

Education
in the novels of
Anne and Charlotte Brontë

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Masters of Arts
in English
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Anne Elise Shave

University of Canterbury
1997

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Chapter One: The early-Victorian educational context	1
Chapter Two: The Brontës' responses to contemporary issues	11
Chapter Three: Education and power	29
Chapter Four: The function of education in relationships	41
Chapter Five: Master-pupil relationships in Charlotte's fiction	55
Chapter Six: Contrasts and conclusions	83

Works Cited

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Helen Debenham, for her encouragement and guidance; the Lincoln High School Principal and Board of Trustees for allowing me a year's leave from teaching; my parents, Ray and Jenny Shave, for continuing to support the student under their roof with such willingness and generosity; and my grandfather, Duncan Brown, whose academic example and interest in my work I have appreciated.

ABSTRACT

Charlotte and Anne Brontë were both educators and it is not surprising that education plays a prominent part in their fiction. It is more surprising that students and educators, who presumably share an interest in the processes and purposes of education, have not attempted, in previous studies, to provide a comprehensive coverage of the Brontës' approach to educational issues or to examine the function of teaching and learning interactions within their novels. My thesis traverses this relatively unexplored territory.

My argument is divided into six parts. First, I outline some of the educational issues of particular significance at the time the Brontë sisters were writing, including school conditions, content of curricula for girls and boys, and "the governess problem". In chapter two I consider the authors' responses to these contemporary issues and raise points of contrast between Anne and Charlotte's approaches to similar subjects. Anne's moral emphasis and desire to affect change is compared with her sister's ambiguous and often contradictory attitudes towards social issues. Next, the close connection between education and power (and characters' exploitation of this feature of education) is explored from several perspectives. I comment on the imbalance of power between the sexes that educational differences contributed to in early-Victorian society and demonstrate that those most desirous of educational power in the Brontës' work are often the most oppressed. Chapters four and five examine the ways in which education contributes to the central heterosexual relationships in the novels, and focus most closely on Charlotte's preoccupation with relationships between masters and pupils.

Finally I compare Anne and Charlotte's treatment of education in order to make some observations about their attitudes towards writing itself. I argue that the sisters' understandings of "truth" in fiction, the recurring conflict between reason and emotion in Charlotte's novels, and Anne's Christian world-view, contribute to the differing approaches to education - and, indeed, a vast number of other issues - within their fiction.

CHAPTER ONE

*"Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever."
(Charles Kingsley, "Farewell")*

Educational issues, institutions, and educators dominate the novels of the Brontës. In four of their seven novels the protagonist is a teacher, governess or tutor, and, in a fifth, one heroine seriously contemplates a future as a governess while another marries her tutor. Two of Charlotte's novels have their primary setting within a school. Both of Anne's novels focus firmly on the content and consequences of education. In Emily's novel, alone, formal education plays a relatively minor role, and for this reason *Wuthering Heights* will not be examined closely within this paper. One would expect that, given the importance placed on education in Charlotte's and Anne's works, however, close attention would already have been paid to their treatment of education, but in fact prior studies have given little more than a cursory glance at the subject, or commented only on the obvious issue of "the governess problem"¹.

For what reasons did the Brontës include formal education within their novels? Although the sisters' preoccupation with teaching and learning obviously reflects their life experiences it is an oversimplification to assume that they merely wrote about the subject because it was familiar to them. Education, and particularly the education of women, was a social issue of enormous importance to the Victorians, and part of the wider "Woman Question" being hotly debated at the time. It has been observed that the issue "offers useful entries into a whole range of works"² because of its complexity and its connections with other problems. Some of these contemporary issues will be outlined shortly.

Like other Victorian novelists, the Brontës explore the purposes of education, the content of curricula, the role of governesses, and conditions in schools. As we shall see in chapter two,

¹ Elizabeth Langland's work on Anne Brontë explores the social context of her writing and her responses to contemporary problems, including education. Patricia Beer and Harriet Björk draw some connections between education and the "Woman Question" in Charlotte's novels. The most comprehensive discussion of relevance to this thesis is to be found in Inga-Stina Ewbank's *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Novelists*.

² Jacqueline Banerjee, "Girls' Education and the Crisis of the Victorian Heroine", 34.

however, despite the number of explicit comments made about such matters, suprisingly little emphasis is placed on social commentary, and education performs a number of other more important functions within the novels. These will be examined more fully. Teaching situations provide the authors with opportunities to present the "truth" about situations they endured as educators and also allow them to emphasise their wider values. Relationships between characters are often developed or cemented while teaching and learning occurs, raising issues of power and sexuality.

Although "the Brontës" may be helpfully discussed as a unit, Anne and Charlotte at times clearly express differing attitudes towards education, and each uses education for unique purposes within her work. Chapters two and six examine the extent to which the sisters view education similarly, and explores reasons for the contrasts within their novels. First, it is necessary to place their work within the educational context in which they were written.

Within the nineteenth century numerous educational issues were hotly debated. Intellectuals and reformists wrote at length on the subject and considerable change, in attitudes and practices, occurred during the century. The central issue concerned the purpose of education and the content of curricula came under increasing scrutiny as their usefulness was questioned. Until the Education Act of 1870, no standard school curricula existed, and students often gained little more than "a smattering of everything and a knowledge of nothing" (*Sketches by Boz*, 126). This was particularly evident within girls' education. Thus, in *Villette*, M. Paul gives "lessons on any and every subject that struck his fancy" (469) without the author's disapprobation, as this piecemeal approach was regarded by many as appropriate preparation for women's later role in society.

"Leisured women were symbols of the economic success of their male relatives" (Burstyn, 30) and most middle-class women sought paid employment only if it was unavoidable. A "good" education, therefore, prepared a girl to attract a husband and to sustain his affection once married. Significant emphasis was placed on accomplishments. *David Copperfield's* Dora sings French songs "about the impossibility of ever on any account leaving off dancing, La ra

la, La ra la" (443) but is unable to control the household servants or manage basic domestic accounts. Dickens emphasises the negative consequences of this faulty education, but it is not an outrageously unrealistic portrayal. Other social commentators were expressing similar concerns:

As a rule, her youth is spent in acquiring mere show-knowledge, and her life after marriage, except when immersed in the cares of the nursery, in vacant and aimless activity. In speaking of the education of women as defective, we allude rather to its whole scope and purpose than to the neglect of any particular studies. (Patmore, 532)

However, many intelligent analysts, who advocated reforms in girls' education, remained convinced that a woman's primary function was to support her husband, as decoratively as possible. Besides accomplishments, wives merely needed superficial general knowledge "to prevent [them] from becoming absolute ninnies" (McMurty, 189). With this in mind, Ginevra Fanshawe applies herself "in earnest" to music, singing and dancing; "such mere trifles as lessons in history, geography, grammar, and arithmetic, she left undone, or got others to do for her" (*Villette*, 121). A man could be encouraged to study in some depth, but John Ruskin's magnanimous view, in 1865, was that "a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as it may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasure, and in those of his best friends" (Ruskin, 161).

In 1869, John Stuart Mill objected that "while women are brought up as they are, a man and a woman will but rarely find in one another real agreement of tastes and wishes as to daily life" (Rossi, 232). Fourteen years earlier, however, his ^{future} wife, Harriet Taylor, had already pointed to flaws in the arguments made by "moderate reformers" like Ruskin. She claimed that true communion in marriage could only occur if women were "educated for themselves and for the world - not one sex for the other" and "if education took the same pains to form strong minded women which it takes to prevent them from being formed" (Rossi, 113,112). Dickens' novels are interesting in this respect; he may ridicule such practices in *Little Dorrit*, where Mrs General's "way of forming a mind was to prevent it from forming opinions" (503), but also clearly approves of heroines whose education primarily equips them to contribute to the well-being of the men in their lives. Bella Rokesmith, for example, sets herself to "the mastering of the newspaper", "so that she might be close up with John on general topics when John came

home" (*Our Mutual Friend*, 750) but she clearly has no genuine thirst for independent knowledge or education. Agnes Wickfield and Esther Summerson are similarly "angels in the house".

The debate continued throughout the century:

With a growing proportion of educated women waiting about for years for a marriage which might never eventuate, they began increasingly to question their role in the world - and the world itself. (Kane, 87)

Increasing numbers of single women expressed their frustration and resentment against a society which "loved to keep [them] children" (Tennyson, *The Princess*, l 133). Masculine pseudonyms and fictional characters enabled writers to express outspoken views. Thus, "Caroline Helstone" may address the men of Yorkshire:

You would wish to be proud of your daughters, and not to blush for them; then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manoeuvre, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered; they will be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you. Cultivate them - give them scope and work (*Shirley*, 444).

Within the same novel, *Shirley* complains that she and Caroline are both "ignorant as stone" (396), but later nineteenth century novels indicate that educational reform was slow. George Eliot's scepticism about the progress of women's education is demonstrated in *Middlemarch*, which, although set in 1830, highlights an issue which remained topical in 1872. Dorothea Brooke's frustration that she is restricted "by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgement of discursive mouse" (50), is contrasted with Rosamund Vincy's employment of precisely the arts Ginevra Fanshawe utilises in Charlotte's novel of 1853.

Educational reform was hindered by the Victorian perception of the "ideal" woman. Besides being accomplished, pretty, and domestically competent, she was supposedly the guardian of society's morality, although men retained the power to dictate which material was suitable for her to study. Lucy Snowe's education, in *Villette*, is shaped by this widely accepted attitude:

I was vaguely threatened with, I know not what doom, if I ever trespassed the limits proper to my sex, and conceived a contraband desire for unfeminine knowledge. (508)

M. Paul also censors Lucy's reading - "he generally pruned before lending his books, especially if they were novels" (501) - and Shirley Keeldar's enjoyment in reading "just what gentlemen read" (368) is derived partly from her knowledge that she is defying society's norms. Later, Shirley refuses to fulfil the morally improving role traditionally assigned to women, dismissively exclaiming, "Pah! my husband is not to be my baby!" (706) Jane Eyre, similarly, rejects Mr Rochester's view of her as angelic. With a clear understanding of the unrealistic pressures the role would place upon her, she asserts her independence: "I am not an angel, ... and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself." (327) It is Helen Graham who accepts the Victorian ideal, and enters marriage hoping to reform Arthur Huntingdon:

If he has done amiss, I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 147).

The sobering consequences of her decision form the basis of Helen's education, and the novel "conveys its own moral" (Preface, xxxvii) to the reader. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* powerfully criticises the false idealism of women which impinged upon their formal education so significantly. Whether Charlotte's novels do the same, despite the forthright exclamations of their heroines, is less certain, as we shall see in chapters two and six.

Women's supposed purity was not the only assumption behind the restricted range of subjects available to them, however. Some were simply deemed to be beyond their capabilities. Men were generally believed to be capable of long, earnest thought and originality, whereas women, although characterised by greater intuition, were thought not to have the ability to concentrate or reason. Originality was viewed with suspicion, as Charlotte satirically reveals in *Shirley*. The Miss Sympons, who "were an example to their sex", had been "educated faultlessly", with the following result:

The Abomination of Desolation was no mystery to them: they had discovered that unutterable Thing in the characteristic others call Originality. Quick were they to recognize the signs of this evil; and whenever they saw its trace ... they shuddered, they recoiled. Danger was above their heads, peril about their steps. ... Being unintelligible it must be bad. (512)

Arguments about the desirability of a broadened curriculum continued. It was feared that the study of classical literature, with its lewd references, would pollute women; mathematics was

felt to require logic that was contrary to their natural reasoning processes; physical education was regarded as immodest; theology was thought to undermine women's natural faith. Essentially, it was assumed that women were unable to reason with any degree of sophistication. This view was held by both sexes, as a letter to Robert Browning from Elizabeth Barrett demonstrates:

There is a natural inferiority of mind in women - of the intellect ... not by any means of the moral nature - ... I believe women ... all of us in a mass ... to have minds of quicker movement, but less power and depth ... and that we are under your feet, because we can't stand upon our own. (4 July, 1845, cited in Burstyn, 71)

Shirley questions whether "all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls" (370), but, as we shall see, she willingly falls at the feet of the first intellectually imposing man she meets. Eliot portrays the possible disillusionment inherent in such a marriage as Dorothea Brooke's belief that the "provinces of masculine knowledge" are "a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly" (*Middlemarch*, 88) is stripped away. Further consequences of the discrepancies between men and women's education will be examined in chapter three.

Boys' education was also subject to scrutiny in the nineteenth century and considerable reform resulted. Entry to the best schools and universities demanded proficiency in the classics, so much emphasis was placed on rote learning. What Dickens identifies as a kind of intellectual force-feeding, in *Dombey and Son*, is described explicitly by Anne Brontë in *Agnes Grey*, as Mrs Murray issues instructions to her new governess:

For the girls, she seemed anxious only to render them as superficially attractive and showily accomplished as they could possibly be made ... With regard to the two boys ... I was to get the greatest possible quantity of Latin grammar and Valpy's Delectus into their heads, in order to fit them for school. (64)

This may have prepared boys for their later studies but did not necessarily equip them to fulfil an increasing range of adult roles in society. The mill owners in *Shirley*, for example, have received no vocational training, and their relationships with their employees are affected by the educational distance between them, combined with poor negotiating skills and lack of empathy. More importantly, as increasing numbers of boys were educated away from home, character development and moral training became an issue of national significance. Between 1828 and 1842, Dr Thomas Arnold introduced a regime of "muscular Christianity" at Rugby, which

influenced education until at least the mid 1960's. His emphasis on duty, morality, physical strength and loyalty to the school, and the establishment of a hierarchical prefect system, were intended to overcome many of the problems existent in larger public schools such as Eton, Winchester and Westminster:

These were worlds of licensed barbarism in which dozens, if not hundreds, of boys lived in common, largely subject to the unpredictable discipline of individuals and factions amongst themselves. At Eton in 1825 one boy killed another in a fight over a seat in the schoolroom. (Wintle, 15)

In *The Professor*, William Crimsworth contemplates the prospect of his son's departure for Eton in the light of his own experiences at the school. These cause him to believe that Victor's "first year or two will be utter wretchedness" (265), but William comfortably concludes that from "the ordeal of merited and salutary suffering ... he will [be]come ... a wiser and better man" (267). As this demonstrates, despite the publication of her novels at the time of such important educational changes, Charlotte Brontë depicts schooling of an earlier era or of another culture. Often, too, such portrayals are not naturalistic, and the lack of naturalism and its effect upon the presentation of education in Charlotte's work will be investigated more closely in my concluding chapter.

Writers of the nineteenth century were also concerned to address the condition of poorer boarding schools. Penny Kane neatly summarises one of the difficulties:

The purpose of a school was not necessarily to educate; some existed simply to keep - or lose - unwanted children at a convenient distance from family or guardians. (59)

Yorkshire schools were particularly notorious, as they were inaccessible, often very cheap, and many kept students throughout traditional holiday breaks.³ Dickens' famous portrayal of Dotheboys' Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby* arose from personal research which he undertook when rumours about abuses were rife. His intention, clearly, was to increase readers' sensitivity to an issue which had already been reported in many newspapers, thereby affecting social change. His treatment of the subject may be compared with Charlotte Brontë's depiction of Lowood

³ Philip Collins provides a comprehensive summary of the conditions of Yorkshire schools in *Dickens and Education*, chapter five. Similarly, Juliet Barker gives ample evidence of abuses in such schools in *The Brontës*, chapter five.

School in *Jane Eyre*, which arose from her own childhood experiences.⁴ The author's contemporaries later confirmed that her representation of harsh physical circumstances and psychological brutality accurately reflected life at Cowan Bridge School between 1823 and 1825. Juliet Barker's recent biography of the Brontës quotes a number of former pupils whose memories of the appalling food, unhygienic conditions, and hypocrisy of the institutional management are bluntly stated. "A.H." wrote to *Littell's Living Age*, on September 15, 1855:

I suffered so severely from the treatment that I was never in the schoolroom the last three months I was there until about a week before I left and was considered to be far gone in a consumption. My Mother (whose only child I was) was never informed of my illness and I might certainly have died there without her being informed of it had not a severe illness of her own caused her hastily to summon me home. (135)

As Charlotte remained convinced throughout her life that the school's conditions were responsible for the deaths of her two older sisters it is not surprising that her intensely personal description remains one of the most enduring images of nineteenth century education that many readers possess. It is less frequently recalled that *Jane Eyre* ultimately benefits from the breadth and quality of education she has received at Lowood; her abilities, particularly in languages and drawing, are admired by others throughout the novel and enable her to acquire what must be one of the most undemanding governing positions in Victorian literature. Obviously not all Yorkshire schools were bad; at Roe Head School in 1831 and 32 Charlotte herself "made dramatic improvements ... in every aspect of her life" (Barker, 181).

In examining education in novels of the period attention must be given to the figure of the governess, although it is not my intention to embark upon a detailed re-examination of a subject which has received much able treatment from others. Increasing numbers of single women were forced to seek employment as governesses in the nineteenth century and the position became "a standard feature of Victorian fiction", as Angeline Goreau observes in her introduction to the Penguin edition of *Agnes Grey* (42). Jane Fairfax, in *Emma*, is an early example of a woman whose financial circumstances lead her to seek employment as a governess, and the pity with which others regard her is an indication of the social degradation

⁴ Henry Bonnell, in *Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Jane Austen: Studies in their Works*, makes an interesting observation: "Charlotte did not expect its original would be discovered. She was not a reformer like Dickens. *Jane Eyre* was not a novel with a purpose" (37).

inherent in her position. Jane Austen's comic vision, which rescues the character from a demeaning future by providing her with a financially secure marriage, may be compared with Anne Brontë's perspective in *Agnes Grey*. Although the heroine willingly chooses her employment, and later, like Jane Fairfax, marries, the novel as a whole focuses firmly on the governess's predicament, reflecting the experiences of its author and many others. It was hailed by some as an accurate and helpful account - one lady of rank recorded her intentions to "give it to every family with a governess" and to "read it through again when I have a governess to remind me to be human"⁵- and Anne Brontë certainly emphasises the powerlessness, isolation and social degradation of the governess's position. I shall return to her treatment of the subject, in comparison with Charlotte's, in my next chapter.

It is important to note that the plight of governesses was an issue of immense importance at the time the Brontës' novels were written. Governesses were underpaid, overworked, and had no financial security. The sheer numbers of women seeking employment lowered their market value while increasing employers' concerns about educational standards. The rising middle class demanded governesses who could provide an academic, social and moral education; in addition to formal instruction governesses were expected to positively influence children's speech and etiquette, and to impart basic domestic skills including sewing and household management. Academic expectations were artificially high, as one governess later complained in the periodical *Household Words*:

The salaries, generally speaking, were low ... but all demanded much more than the value of their money. To know English generally, German, French, and Italian - acquired in their respective countries - to be an accomplished pianiste - to sing, draw and dance, were the usual group of accomplishments demanded for the liberal pay of thirty and forty pounds. ... The reflection was forced upon my mind that many ladies who want governesses must be profoundly foolish to imagine that women like themselves can be proficient in half-a-dozen arts and sciences which, separately and singly, form the whole life-study of able men. (August 23, 1856, 140)

These and similar concerns led to the establishment of several institutions for governesses in the 1840's. In 1843, the establishment of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution provided some financial relief for governesses facing unemployment or old age. Deficiencies in their education

⁵ Lady Amberley, from Patricia Thomson's *The Victorian Heroine* (53).

were next addressed when, with Church of England support, Queen's College for Women opened in London in 1848, just one year after the publication of *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey*. The non-conformist Bedford College followed soon afterwards.⁶ Interestingly, Charlotte Brontë "had her reservations about the Governess Institution from the start" as she felt it to be "both absurd and cruel" (Barker, 601) to raise the academic standards of women when they were already poorly paid for what they offered. Nevertheless, further schools were established in the 1850's, including Cheltenham Ladies' College, which became a teacher-training institution. Although it has been somewhat callously observed that in comparison with their fictional counterparts "the real-life fact about governesses was that nothing much happened to them" (McMurty, 202), it is important to understand the "real-life" social conditions with which Anne and Charlotte both had to cope, and which undoubtedly influenced their writing.

As I have demonstrated, the Brontës were aware of the complex debates about education that raged in the society around them, and they included many references to current issues and arguments within their novels. This chapter has clarified the social context of their work. Their treatment of education is not always naturalistic or systematic, however, and at times their novels are notable in terms of what they *fail* to say about contemporary issues. We will now examine more closely how topical educational subjects are addressed within Charlotte and Anne's work, before moving to the wider issues explored by each and investigating other functions of educational interactions within their fiction.

⁶ Comparisons between the two women's colleges are drawn succinctly by Joan Burstyn in *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 23-24. Burstyn's work also discusses in considerable detail many issues which can only be alluded to in this introduction to the social background to the Brontës' writing.

CHAPTER TWO

*"A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."
(Alexander Pope)*

When one considers teaching and learning interactions as well as specific comments on education within the novels of Charlotte and Anne Brontë several questions arise. How do they respond to the contemporary issues raised in chapter one? Is educational reform advocated by either Charlotte or Anne, or both? Why? What elements of education are perceived as most important, or receive the most concentrated focus in their writing? This chapter begins to address these questions, drawing some comparisons between the differing perspectives of Anne and Charlotte, but a more detailed examination of why their novels have differing emphases will be postponed until chapter six.

First, it is important to note that both Charlotte and Anne claimed “truth” of their fiction, and stated their intentions that the novels themselves would be educative for the reader. This is most clearly seen in the bold opening of *Agnes Grey*, which asserts that “all true histories contain instruction” (3) (thereby staking a claim both for her work’s veracity and its usefulness), and in Anne’s explicit authorial comment in the Preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*:

I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it ... Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim. (xxxvii)

Charlotte, too, at least professes to view fiction in a similar light. Her direct apostrophes to the reader underline her consciousness of the impact of her writing upon her imagined audience, but two examples from *The Professor* serve to demonstrate more explicitly her concurrence with Anne’s attitudes. Charlotte states that “novelists should never allow themselves to weary of the study of real life” (159) - an interesting philosophy for this author to espouse in the light of the more fantastic elements of her work - and Crimsworth is clearly her mouthpiece when he gives a detailed account of his teaching methods, concluding, “my experience may possibly be

of use to others" (67). Supporting the authenticity of *Shirley*, in response to a review which described many of its male characters as "unreal as Madame Tussaud's waxworks" Charlotte wrote to her publisher: "Are there no such men as the Helstones and Yorkes? Yes there are Is the first chapter disgusting or vulgar? It is not: it is real." (Barker, 610) Both Brontë sisters, therefore, would appear to share similar aims, but their treatment of education only partly supports such a conclusion. This may be partly attributable to the differing understandings each sister has of "truth" but as this issue is worthy of some elaboration further discussion will be postponed until chapter six.

As neither of Anne's novels is set in a school the most helpful comparison between the sisters' presentation of educational matters can initially be made by examining their treatment of governesses. Both were writing from personal experience and at first glance appear to address the same concerns and express similar views. In the Brontë's novels the role of the governess is portrayed as socially demeaning, although it is significant that Agnes Grey embarks on her chosen course without anticipating the dismissive arrogance with which she would be treated:

How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance.
(12)

Agnes's disillusionment is an integral part of her own education and that of the reader, as her idealism, anticipation of independence, and enthusiasm for a task which financial necessity has not driven her to, are quickly stripped from her:

Either the children were so incorrigible, the parents so unreasonable, or myself so mistaken in my views, or so unable to carry them out, that my best intentions and most strenuous efforts seemed productive of no better result than sport to the children, dissatisfaction to their parents, and torment to myself. (29)

The novel depicts countless incidents which place Agnes in an intolerable position; it is a picture of daily injustices, slights, oversights and insults. Agnes is forced to walk submissively behind those she regards as equals (111), ride backwards in the stuffiest corner of a coach she is almost shut out of (84), finish the most tedious and unappealing parts of her students' handiwork (67), to absent herself when unwanted and to put herself at others' disposal at their convenience. Mrs Murray arrogantly informs Agnes that her success as a governess will

depend upon her “[losing] sight of herself” by devoting herself “body and soul” to her “calling” (160). Layer upon layer of detail is provided to build up an accurate picture of a governess’s lot. “Though the story is fiction, it is told like fact, and documented wherever possible by what the reader may recognise as fact” (Craik, 229). Following a chapter providing a particularly negative account of her duties, the narrator remarks:

My design, in writing the few last pages, was not to amuse, but to benefit those whom it might concern ... if a parent therefrom gathered any useful hint, or an unfortunate governess received thereby the slightest benefit, I am well rewarded for my pains. (36)

It is worth noting that, despite her own difficulties, and her determination to portray the real hardships of a governess’s position, Anne Brontë herself evidently became a successful governess, gaining the affection and trust of her pupils. After her departure from Thorp Green, she continued to hear “almost daily” from her former pupils, Elizabeth and Mary Robinson, one of whom, by Charlotte’s account, seemed “to cling to her quiet, former governess as her only true friend” (Barker, 573). Nevertheless, Anne ultimately summarises the occupation as “working as a hireling among strangers, despised and trampled on” (*Agnes Grey*, 176). Like Dickens, she asserts that “no man can expect his children to respect what he degrades” (*Martin Chuzzlewit*, 646), and her unemotional account, “carefully copied from the life” (Preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, xxxviii) convinces the reader of the necessity for change.

Charlotte was self-confessedly entirely unsuited to the role of governess or teacher, and expressed severe reservations about the job within both her letters and novels. She confided to Ellen Nussey:

No one but myself can tell how hard a governess’s work is to me - for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are to the employment. (Barker, 351)

While governess for the Sidgwick family she wrote to Emily:

I see now, more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil. While she is teaching the children, working for them, amusing them, it is all right. If she steals a moment for herself she is a nuisance. (Barker, 310-11)

Her fictional creations are even more forthright. Shirley Keeldar's reaction to Caroline Helstone's expressed ambition to alter her circumstances is brusque: "Nonsense! ... What an idea! Be a governess! Better be a slave at once!" (*Shirley*, 271). Edward Rochester, who is, after all, Jane's employer, also describes the occupation as "slavery" (*Jane Eyre*, 340). Further accounts of the indignities of the role are expressed in such heartfelt tones by Mrs Pryor (*Shirley*, chapter 21) that "Currer Bell" thereby inadvertently revealed herself to be "a Yorkshire woman and one who had been a governess"¹¹. Lucy Snowe, in *Villette*, also regards a governess's position as destroying any possibility of independence, and refuses a salary three times greater than she earns in a school: "I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or paid companion was unnatural to me ... I was no bright lady's shadow" (427). Likewise Jane Eyre, despite a generous salary of thirty pounds may feel "degraded" in her position teaching in Morton's village school (458) but regards it as more positive than the alternative:

... it was plodding - but then, compared with that of a governess in a rich house it was independent; and the fear of servitude with strangers entered my soul like iron. (453)

Jane's experience as a governess has in fact been surprisingly easy. Although she (like Agnes Grey) feels the slights of those who believe they are socially superior, her role allows her a good deal of freedom. Her relationship with her pupil may perhaps best be described as one of cool detachment, and she certainly does not appear to have to "steal a moment for herself":

Charlotte never succeeded in her posts as governess in a private home, yet, surprisingly, her novels fail to represent the difficulties and humiliations in that position. In *Jane Eyre*, the eponymous heroine finds herself in charge of a docile, if vain, child, and in the presence of a motherly housekeeper. The task of teaching scarcely consumes her time, and she has huge tracts of leisure for dalliance with Rochester. It is a highly romanticised portrait of the governess's life. (Langland, 100)

Although Jane becomes a governess explicitly seeking "a new servitude" (101) release from this service is willingly seized. Tom Winniffrith notes that Charlotte's most financially independent female character, Shirley, not only speaks up for "the depressed governess class" but "marries into it" (174); however it is more usual for her heroines, like other fictional Victorian governesses, to escape:

¹¹ Unsigned review, *Fraser's Magazine*, Dec. 1849, 691-4 (Barker, 610).

The governess's many representatives in the novel depart from reality chiefly in the fairy tale magic that frees a disproportionate number of them from their fate. (McMurty, 202)

The figure of the governess in Charlotte's novels is often more significant as a "representative of distressed womanhood" (Lenta, 28) than as an educator, and although her characters are certainly often outspoken about "the governess problem" we shall find that the plots of her novels demonstrate an uneasy ambivalence towards the wider issue of the role of women. Philippa Levine suggests that Brontë's "preoccupation with fictional teachers and governesses" is attributable to her desire to include "feminist motifs" of the period, but, as we shall discover, her heroines' professed beliefs are often undermined by their actions. Patricia Beer, citing a letter from Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams (15 June 1848) makes an extremely significant observation, which I will return to in an examination of the role of education within relationships in the Brontës' novels, in chapter five:

In maturity, Charlotte Brontë's views on the Woman Question, as it was brought to her notice over the years, were confused. For one thing her deeply-held belief that adversity does people good was bound to include the notion that for women to be exploited and put upon was not an entirely bad state of affairs.

"A governess's experience is frequently indeed bitter, but its results are precious; the mind, feeling, temper are there subjected to a discipline equally painful and priceless." (29)

Within *Shirley* Charlotte Brontë expresses contradictory views, and the questioning manner with which Caroline Helstone concludes her musings on the role of "old maids" provides a good example of the inconclusive tone of the novel: "Queer thoughts these that surge in my mind: are they right thoughts? I am not certain." (195) Critics have drawn differing conclusions from such passages. Harriet Björk, for example, addresses the question of education in *Shirley*. She emphasises Charlotte's questioning of conventions but accepts that Brontë's work has "an ambivalent ideological grasp" (111) and that her "claims for a change of heart are perhaps, on the whole, not very impressive, intellectually and politically" (142). Shirley Foster even alleges that "ambivalence and ambiguity are the key-notes of Brontë's novels" (77):

It may be ... in keeping with Brontë's own intentions to regard her novels as conscious explorations of personally important issues with whose complexities she is seeking to come to terms. The contradictory elements in her work may then be seen as avowed declarations of her ambivalence, and the ambiguities as an acknowledgement of the insolubility of the the problems she depicts. (79)

Foster's understanding is well supported by correspondence between Charlotte and her publisher. An important (and therefore lengthy) extract from a letter dated 12 May 1848 follows. In it, Charlotte expresses the desire to "say something about the "condition of women" question" but frankly admits that her own views on the subject are confused:

- it [the condition of women question] is one respecting which so much 'cant' has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it. It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked - but where or how could another be opened? ... One can see where the evil lies - but who can point out the remedy? When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a house to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident - when destiny isolates her - I suppose she must do what she can - live as she can - complain as little - bear as much - work as well as possible. This is not high theory - but I believe it is sound practice - (Barker, 556)

Charlotte's inconclusiveness can be somewhat unsettling for the reader, particularly in the case of *Shirley*, in which there is so marked a dichotomy between the expressed desires of its heroines and the behaviour of each. Even contemporary reviewers recognised that "all was not well as the the dual voice at once approved feminine propriety in the domestic sphere and simultaneously rewrote it as a horror" (Ingham, 40). Other critics have argued that the apparent contradictions in Charlotte Brontë's work arise not as "avowed declarations of her ambivalence", as Foster believes, but from more deep-rooted unconscious conflicts:

Charlotte's attitudes toward the problems of her own sex oscillated between extremes. On the one hand, there was resentment and rebellion, on the other a residual conservatism; a sense of duty, combined with a desire for feminine propriety, was in conflict with an aching yearning for liberty; finally, sharply defined male and female attributes within her were not only in conflict with one another, but also with a strong artistic impulse towards androgyny. The divisions of her mind reflected the deep divisions of her nature. (Prentis, 124)

Some of the tensions in her work will be examined further in chapter five.

The debate may remain unresolved but it seems unnecessary to search deeply for hidden reasons for Charlotte Brontë's ambivalence when obvious ones exist. It is useful to note her

personal reactions to advice she received about her own role as a woman in Victorian society. In March 1837 Charlotte received Robert Southey's discouraging response to some of her poetry:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. (Barker, 262)

Although one may wonder precisely what "proper duties" Charlotte's writing might have caused her to neglect at this stage of her life, it appears that Southey and Patrick Brontë were in full accord on the matter and that Charlotte took their opinions seriously. It seems ironic that the future creator of *Jane Eyre* valued such a letter, even noting on its wrapper, "Southey's Advice To be kept for ever" (Barker, 263). In reply she wrote:

Following my father's advice - who from my childhood has counselled me ... I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. (Barker, 243)

Despite the eminently quotable extracts one may isolate from the novels to portray Charlotte Brontë as an advocate of social reform it is clear that she was personally willing to accept societal norms. Her response to the contemporary issues outlined in my first chapter is remarkably muted, and it is impossible to make a case for her as an author at the forefront of educational change regardless of the timely appearance of her work in which education features so prominently. To attempt to do so does her an injustice, and tends to lead to sharply negative criticism. Two examples follow (in both cases the italics are mine):

Charlotte's views ... were so confused that *she lacked the courage to do more than sketch the sociological novel*, and concentrated on the safer autobiographical theme. (Winnifrith, 162)

Juliet Barker is even more harsh:

One cannot escape the conclusion that her intellectual engagement with the question [of the condition of women] arose purely and simply as a result of her own unhappiness. If she had been financially independent 'the condition of women' would not have mattered to her. *She could not write about a cause for ideological reasons, out of empathy or altruism* ... Personal experience alone could engage her interest. (556)

One may agree with the truth of these statements without criticising Charlotte Brontë for giving primary focus to elements other than social reform. Patricia Beer approaches this perspective, but disapproval is implied:

Charlotte Brontë writes of individuals, each with her own frustrations and her own solution to them. She does not think in terms of a cause and can see no body of women to lead. (2)

We have already seen that Charlotte does *at times* “think in terms of a cause”, but it must be accepted that there are many issues she simply chooses to ignore. Her novels appear surprisingly oblivious of local issues despite her father’s very public involvement in a number of diverse social reforms, including those relating to education. Patrick Brontë was an enthusiastic advocate of a national education system, and closely involved in overseeing improvements to schooling within the district. He was a founding member of the Bradford Church Institution which led to the establishment of a new National School in Haworth in 1844.¹² At precisely this time Charlotte returned from Brussels, expecting to open her own school, and although “The Miss Brontës’ Establishment” was (theoretically) to attract different clientele it may be assumed that she took some interest in the educational issues that concerned her father. Her published work gives us no indication that this was so. Charlotte’s evasion of contemporary problems is achieved by setting her novels overseas or in a different era. *Shirley*, for example, was written in 1848-9 when industrial unrest in England was rife, but rather than considering the contemporary Chartist disturbances Charlotte sets her novel at the time of the Luddite riots, towards the end of the Napoleonic wars. Barker suggests that both Charlotte and Emily, immersed in their imaginary worlds, on a number of occasions avoided the “tumultuous events” around them and “deliberately clung to quite a different view of Haworth” (270).

Although Charlotte Brontë does allude to topical issues, and expresses opinions on matters of contemporary debate, it is evident that these are not fully developed and are not her primary focus. As the following chapters demonstrate, her concern is with the internal life and relationships of her characters and consequently some of the forceful opinions expressed by her

¹² Juliet Barker cites correspondence in which Patrick Brontë argues heatedly for an improvement in local education (430).

fictional creations appear to be little more than set-pieces. The prominence of education within her novels is not due to a burning concern about the need for reform but fulfils other functions. These will be explored in chapters three to five. In contrast, however, both of Anne Brontë's novels may be said to be "about" education and, as I have already mentioned, her purpose is didactic.

Russell Poole argues that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is "a novel of conflicts and contradictions" because "female desire is repressed *and* liberated. Male desire is condemned *and* encouraged. Social practices are reformed *and* reproduced" (871). While such contrasts may legitimately be made - and Poole's discussion is persuasive - the "conflicts and contradictions" in Anne's work are very different from those we have observed in her sister's. When we examine her treatment of education Anne Brontë's perspective is unambiguous; she is undoubtedly concerned to address many of the contemporary problems outlined in my first chapter, and does so forcefully when these involve moral issues. The directness and simplicity of Anne's expression has led to disparaging comparisons between her work and that of her sisters, but I would argue that her novels are in fact much more "radical" in their social criticism than has been allowed, and the clarity of her style fulfils her purposes. Susan Meyer agrees, while her understanding of Brontë's intentions is different from, although not incompatible with, mine. She describes *Agnes Grey* as being "characterised by a quiet emotionally restrained tone":

But the coolness and restraint are both deliberate on Anne Brontë's part and important to the novel's aims ... And if the plot *Agnes Grey* offers is simple, the social criticism it offers ... is complex. (5)

Barbara Prentis also comments on Anne Brontë's treatment of contemporary issues. She asserts that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* "is a strong, brave, telling protest against the treatment of the Woman and the Child by mid-Victorian society" and emphasises that education is "the root of the matter" (27). As we have seen, one of the central issues relating to education in the nineteenth century was its purpose, and arguments about the relevance of the subjects, skills and values being communicated to students focused on their effectiveness in preparing girls and

boys for later roles in life. Anne Brontë participates in the contemporary debate and criticises several aspects of education which were widely accepted in Victorian society.

Both *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey* implicitly criticise the popular notion that education for girls should merely equip them for marriage, although it is equally true that Helen Graham and Rosalie Murray make tragic choices because their understanding of the role of a wife is inadequate and faulty. Anne, like Charlotte, squarely faces the fact that not all Victorian women could expect to marry, and even those who did could later be thrown on their own resources and need to provide for themselves. Anne provides a number of examples of self-sufficient women, one of whom confidently assures her husband that "it's no matter whether [our daughters] get married or not: we can devise a thousand honest ways of making a livelihood" (*Agnes Grey*, 54). Believing she has lost her only hope of matrimony Agnes Grey dutifully resigns herself to a future of teaching, but her mother is enthusiastic about the challenge of establishing her own school and clings to her independence even when her children offer her alternatives. Similarly, Helen Huntingdon establishes a studio, employs an agent in London, and makes a living from painting. As Elizabeth Langland observes, Anne Brontë:

gives us portraits of women prepared to support themselves in the world, women who are independent of male approval and who are content without male attention ... [She] was radical in claiming a professional identity for women. (55)

Education, therefore, needed to provide girls with more than showy accomplishments. It is, after all, only Agnes Grey's ability to offer three languages as well as music, singing, and drawing, that allows her to command a salary of fifty pounds per annum.

Anne Brontë is aware of economic realities but is also concerned about women's education for other reasons. More fundamentally she questions the Victorian "ideal of womanhood" held by so many and upheld within fiction. As I explained in the previous chapter, women were portrayed as guardians of Christian morality who played a redemptive role in the lives of men. Thus Jane Austen's equivalent of Arthur Huntingdon, Henry Crawford, attempts to woo Fanny Price by insisting on the moral influence she has over him: "When you give me your opinion, I

always know what is right. Your judgment is my rule of right" (*Mansfield Park*, 318). Fanny resists (although gradually comes to believe that Henry is "altogether improved" (311)) but Helen, in a similar situation, succumbs. Huntingdon calls Helen his "angel monitress" (200) and claims that she teaches him "other views and nobler aims":

And the very idea of having you to care for under my roof, would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian - not to speak of all the prudence and virtue you would instil into my mind by your wise counsels and sweet, attractive goodness. (174)

Helen's disillusionment in marriage stems from her acceptance of the Victorian ideal and her inability to fulfil it. Despite her best efforts she is unable to "recall [her husband] to the path of virtue" (147) - a point which the author graphically underlines as Arthur Huntingdon lies unrepentant, but afraid, on his deathbed. Arthur believes Helen may act as mediator between God and himself but she reminds him that "no man can deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him" (455). The Victorian ideal, for Anne, is flawed not only because it fails to succeed but because it is a blasphemous notion. "Salvation is found in no-one else [but Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

It is a theme of sufficient importance for Anne to return to several times within her two novels. Although Rosalie Murray does not enter marriage professing Helen's high ideals she clearly believes that as a wife she will naturally exert a positive influence over her husband. She informs Agnes that "reformed rakes make the best possible husbands" (his reform is assumed) and her mother similarly insists that Sir Thomas Ashby will "be all right when he's married" (123). Within twelve months Rosalie despises him. It is not only women that suffer as a result of the Victorian ideal, however. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Lord Lowborough is completely deceived by Annabella Wilmot:

She is the most generous, high-minded being that can be conceived of. She will save me, body and soul, from destruction. Already, she has ennobled me in my own estimation and made me three times better, wiser, greater than I was. Oh! if I had but known her before, how much degradation and misery I should have been spared! (198)

The irony is obvious as this "generous, high-minded being" "loves nothing about him, but his title and pedigree, and 'that delightful old family seat'" (198) and, having gained these, she

sustains a long-term adulterous affair with one of his friends, thereby inflicting "degradation and misery" on several people. A third example from the same novel also exists: one may consider the extent to which Gilbert Markham is in need of reformation and the degree of success Helen has in attempting to change him. Clearly Helen, despite her failure with Arthur Huntingdon, does attempt to educate Gilbert by giving him access to her diary, but, as Russell Poole observes, "critics are ... divided on the issue of how far this admittedly "corrupt" young man can be taught by Helen or can mature in his own right" (863),¹³ Elizabeth Langland compares Anne's treatment of the issue with Charlotte's:

Both women [Jane Eyre and Helen Graham] are seen and see themselves as capable of redeeming the barrenness and waste of [a] man's earlier life, a life in which inadequate education has left him prey to certain vices and vicious tendencies. But, while Jane Eyre is poor, obscure, and plain, Helen Graham is rich, prominent and beautiful. The contrast suggests that Anne Brontë wanted to make explicit that, with all the advantages in the world, no woman can easily reform a man whose habits are already established. (52)

In rejecting the contemporary understanding of women as redemptive figures Anne Brontë does not discount the influence of good people within bad circumstances, but it is not their femininity which is emphasised. "Agnes Grey and Helen Huntingdon in Anne Brontë's two novels exist as moral individuals, not as images of womanly morality" (Ewbank, 41-2). Men may also uphold Christian values, as Edward Weston does, "appearing like the morning-star ... to save [Agnes] from the fear of utter darkness" (103). Anne emphasises the shared moral responsibility of all people, and, in so doing, fully affirms the equality of the sexes without her characters making impassioned speeches about the condition of women. Possibly her most outspoken comment occurs outside the novels themselves, in her Preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, where she asserts her right to put "the humble talents ... God has given ... to their greatest use" and argues that what is morally acceptable for one sex must necessarily be so for the other:

I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be. All novels are or should be written for both men and women to read, and I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a

¹³ Russell Poole seeks to demonstrate that Gilbert Markham learns rather less than has generally been believed (863-4).

woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man. (xxxix)

Inga-Stina Ewbank describes Anne Brontë's work as "feminist in the deepest sense of the word" (84) although it is evident that Anne's Christian understanding underlines the equality of all people before God, and their resultant shared responsibilities, rather than emphasising particular claims of women. Ewbank would appear to agree as she comments further on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's* Preface - "the bravest statement for the literary equality of the sexes that any of the Brontës ever made"(84):

To Anne Brontë, the demands of duty outrule those of conventional propriety; she is a moralist first and a woman second; and if the woman gets in the way of the moralist, all the worse for the woman. The truth must be spoken and taught, no matter what sex the author is. (85)

If all share moral responsibility and equality as individuals before God, all must be adequately educated, and this argument was raised within the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

The basis of eighteenth-century arguments for women's equality stressed woman's possession of a soul capable of redemption. If women had such a soul, then their reason needed to be educated, their faculties elevated to make their redemption possible. Eighteenth-century critics ... argue[d] for equal access to education in order that a woman fulfill the ends for which she was created. (Langland, 138-9)

These views will be explained further in chapter six. In Victorian society there was general agreement that women should be "strongholds of religious faith" but many people disputed the desirability of stimulating women's faith intellectually.¹⁴ For Anne, however, an adequate education for either sex inevitably involves a religious component. Agnes Grey offers advice to Rosalie Ashby which effectively summarises the author's views of what is most central to education:

The end of Religion is not to teach us how to die, but how to live; and the sooner you become wise and good, the more of happiness you secure. (195)

Coventry Patmore, writing four years later, expresses similar sentiments with which Anne Brontë would undoubtedly have concurred:

The chief cause of the defective education and subsequent frivolous life of woman is to be found in a low and narrow view of life itself, making

¹⁴ A comprehensive explanation of the theological debate is given by Joan N. Burstyn, "Religion and Women's Education", in *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*.

worldly advancement its great aim, separating religion from secular life,
and limiting its obligations to certain forms and a few moral precepts.
(533)

We observed in chapter one that as growing numbers of students were sent to boarding schools, and educated without the supposedly positive influence of their mothers, increasing emphasis was placed on the moral development of students. Brontë is not concerned to address changing curricula or teaching methods, although she must have been aware of the progress made in this field by Christian leaders such as Thomas Arnold, but her novels isolate specific faults of education in a wider sense. This is particularly true of boys' education although her work also provides examples of young women whose behaviour is seen to be a by-product of a "defective" upbringing.

Both *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* illustrate the damage done to individuals who are indulged as children rather than educated for adult life. This is seen in its mildest form within the Grey household when Agnes's announcement that she intends to work is met with incredulity. The issue is raised on page four of the novel and is a recurring motif throughout:

I ... was always regarded as the *child*, and the pet of the family: father, mother, and sister, all combined to spoil me - not by foolish indulgence, to render me fractious and ungovernable, but by ceaseless kindness, to make me too helpless and dependent - too unfit for buffeting with the cares and turmoils of adult life.

Later Agnes is brought into contact with children who can do no wrong in their parents' eyes and whose faults are encouraged and laughed at. The consequence of such poor adult influences is that the Bloomfields are "beyond petticoat government already" as their uncle exultantly exclaims (49), and Agnes can teach them nothing. Her second appointment, with the older Murrys, demonstrates the inevitable outcome of allowing children unlimited freedom. The best that may be said of John is that he "might have been a decent lad had he been properly educated" (69), whereas Matilda is a "veritable hoyden" (68). "As a moral agent, Matilda [is] reckless, headstrong, violent and unamenable to reason" (69). Rosalie "had never been taught the distinction between right and wrong" so that her faults are specifically attributed to her education rather than her disposition (66). The same may be said of Ginevra Fanshawe, in Charlotte's *Villette*, for whom Lucy Snowe "proffer[s] the plea of ignorance in extenuation of

most of her faults" (319). Similarly, Mr Rochester excuses himself of youthful wrong-doing because his "principles were never trained" (*Jane Eyre*, 331).

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall raises the same issues. Gilbert Markham attributes his own petulance and irritability to "perhaps" being "a little bit spoiled by my mother and sister" (32) - a view which is confirmed by outsiders. The local vicar "would reprove [Mrs Markham] for being over indulgent to her sons, with a reference to old Eli, or David and Absalom, which was particularly galling to her feelings" (16). Although Gilbert is demonstrably conceited, weak, lacking in self-restraint, and, at worst, violent and vindictive, his faults are minor in comparison with Arthur Huntingdon's. Initially Helen excuses her first husband's behaviour because she believes he has had poor examples before him in his youth (140):

I long to deliver him from his faults ... and make him what he would have been if he had not, from the beginning, had a bad, selfish, miserly father ... and a foolish mother who indulged him to the top of his bent, deceiving her husband for him, and doing her utmost to encourage those germs of folly and vice it was her duty to suppress. (177)

It becomes clear, however, that Huntingdon in fact incites others to evil and is motivated only by self-interest.

In both of her novels Anne emphasises that if adults abdicate their responsibility to educate young children the consequences will be serious. This is demonstrated most dramatically by her approval of Helen Huntingdon's actions in removing her son from his father's influence. "She accomplished the unprecedented end of transforming the story of a runaway wife and fallen woman into that of exemplary womanhood" (Langland, 60) because the alternative is unthinkable. Huntingdon's vices have been described so minutely that the reader is compelled to admire a heroine who is "able to be orthodox on moral or ethical questions, yet think and act independently, or even flout social convention" (Craik, 244). Helen's actions are also prepared for much earlier in the novel, where relevant educational issues are openly debated. Chapter three, entitled "A Controversy", is devoted entirely to an examination of double standards in education as Anne Brontë questions the assumptions underlying the differences between the treatment of boys and girls. Because Helen actively attempts to prevent her son from

"stumbling and blundering along the path of life, sinking into every pitfall" (28) she is accused of treating him "like a girl", making "a mere Miss Nancy of him" (29) and turning him into "the verriest milksop that ever was sopped" (27). Charlotte uses almost identical expressions in *The Professor*, where Hunsden accuses Frances Crimsworth of "making a milksop" of Victor, but, like Helen Huntingdon, Frances responds that it is "better a thousand times he should be a milksop than what he (Hunsden) calls 'a fine lad'" (262-3). Helen's vehement arguments are ridiculed by others but *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* demonstrates the author's concurrence with the views expressed by her heroine:

You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others. Now *I* would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good, and require no experimental proofs to teach them the evil of transgression. (30-1)

Anne is particularly critical of a society which deems dissipation a mark of manhood and educates its boys accordingly. W.A Craik applauds Anne's achievement in creating a character who is a "vicious man who is also socially popular" and:

indulges in the most attractive vices - those of drink, food and love - and has to his credit a handsome person, a vigorous nature, and for a time a loving wife, yet who is never felt by the reader to be for one moment enjoyable or sympathetic. (248)

Thus Anne challenges the "whole scope and purpose" (Patmore, 532) of education for both sexes and addresses the most important contemporary issues discussed in chapter one. Women are to be educated for economic and spiritual reasons, not merely for a marriage which may never eventuate. Men must also learn to live in a morally responsible way, without relying on their wives' or mothers' purifying influence to restore them if they err. Both must be conscious that they may "follow the ways of [their] heart and whatever [their] eyes see, but for all these things God will bring [them] to judgment" (Ecc. 11:9b). For Anne Brontë, a "good" education has eternal value.

As we have seen, both Charlotte and Anne, to a lesser or greater extent, question the principles underlying Victorian education, and are particularly aware of the predicament of governesses.

Charlotte, of course, sets all her novels but *Shirley*, largely or partly, in schools, and one might assume that by doing so she would develop educational themes still further. Clearly there was considerable scope for comment, not only about curricula and school conditions but the quality of teaching practices. Dickens, for instance, expresses strong objections to the appalling teaching that occurred in some institutions, and his novels feature a number of memorable examples. *Nicholas Nickleby* gives us Squeers; *David Copperfield*, Creakle; *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the amiable but incompetent Miss Twinkleton. In *Dombey and Son* young "Biler" is sent to a Charity School to be educated by "a superannuated old Grinder of savage disposition, who had been appointed schoolmaster because he didn't know anything and wasn't fit for anything, and for whose cruel cane all chubby little boys had a perfect fascination" (126). Most of Dickens' teachers embody George Bernard Shaw's dictum that, "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches":

Both novels and articles contain many attacks on the unqualified teacher, even if animated by good intentions - and many of his untrained teachers were evil as well as incompetent. (Collins, 93)

Philip Collins cites periodicals of the day which are not only concerned with the lack of qualifications teachers possess but criticise their ability to simply communicate intelligibly with students in their classes. One teacher:

having used the word 'summary', explained, "I fear, children, I may have employed a term you may not readily comprehend. I allude to the word 'summary'. It is synonymous with 'synopsis'." (91)

Charlotte Brontë regarded the ability to communicate effectively with individuals as "the one great qualification necessary to the task" of teaching:

the faculty, not merely of acquiring but of imparting knowledge; the power of influencing young minds; that natural fondness for - that innate sympathy with children ... He or She who possesses this faculty, this sympathy - though perhaps not otherwise highly accomplished - need never fear in the career of instruction. (Barker, 351-2)

It was a quality she herself lacked, and, as we shall see in the following chapter, Charlotte's negative teaching experiences coloured the classroom interactions that occur within her novels. She, like Dickens, describes teachers who employ sarcasm and ridicule their students, reducing them to tears. Her teachers also restrain or discipline students physically, shutting them in

cupboards or destroying their work. She writes considerably more about the disciplinary techniques adopted by teachers than the content of the education they provide, but their practices are rarely faulted. Often they are praised. Clearly Charlotte's intentions in portraying teachers of this type are very different from Dickens'. We will now consider the role of the teacher and the close connection between education and power within the Brontës' novels.

CHAPTER THREE

*"Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face."
(Oliver Goldsmith)*

Charlotte Brontë disliked teaching and recognised that she was completely unsuited to the occupation. Her letters and diaries offer helpful insights into her attitudes towards her students and the tasks she was required to perform, and, as we shall see, these attitudes permeate her novels. The following outburst of frustration appears in her diary during her second year teaching at Roe Head School:

The thought came over me am I to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage, forcibly suppressing my rage at the idleness the apathy and the hyperbolical and most asinine stupidity of these fat-headed oafs and on compulsion assuming an air of kindness, patience and assiduity? ... just then a Dolt came up with a lesson. I thought I should have vomited. (Barker, 254-5)

Charlotte's accounts of her experiences reveal that she thought of teaching as an interruption to her writing and regarded her pupils as adversaries. She resented the familiarity of the students and clung to her privacy:

... if those Girls knew how I loathe their company they would not seek mine as much as they do ... Stupidity the atmosphere, school-books the employment, asses the society, what in all this is there to remind me of the divine, silent, unseen land of thought. (Barker, 255)

Such vitriolic passages lead Muriel Spark to suggest that "if anything could equal the misfortune of their lot as teachers it was the lot of the respective pupils and employers of Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne" (13). The Robinsons' obvious affection for Anne must cause us to question elements of this statement, but one certainly feels considerable sympathy for the "fat-headed oafs" and "asses" under Charlotte's supervision.

Given the intensity of Charlotte's response to teaching it is not surprising that the educational incidents in her fiction often mirror her own experiences. In her first novel the narrator draws attention to the parallel between life and fiction as he prefaces a description of a class with the words, "Let the idealists ... just look here while I open my portfolio and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature" (97). In most of her novels Charlotte describes classroom

interactions from the teacher's perspective (in marked contrast with Dickens, as we noted in the previous chapter) and although some of these teachers express pleasure in their occupation, almost all hold their pupils in contempt. Students are seen as sub-human. They have "short memories, dense intelligence [and] feeble reflective powers" (*The Professor*, 67) and some disrupt lessons by producing animal noises and spitting (*The Professor*, 101). They are likened to "desperate swine":

Their intellectual faculties were generally weak, their animal propensities strong; thus there was at once an impotence and kind of inert force in their natures; they were dull, but they were also singularly stubborn, heavy as lead and like lead, most difficult to move. (*The Professor*, 67)

Jane Eyre's first encounter with the students at Morton School forces her to remind herself that despite their unprepossessing appearances these "heavy-looking, gaping rustics" (467) share her humanity:

I must not forget that these coarsely clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born. (*Jane Eyre*, 458)

Of course the "best-born" do not fare well in *Jane Eyre* either. Miss Ingram is dismissed as "very showy ... but not genuine":

She had fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor ... She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books; she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. (232)

In other novels the author attributes the inferiority of the students to their religion. The "swinish multitude" in *Villette* "were not to be driven by force" (115) as "the poor girls were tutored to report in Catholic ears whatever the Protestant teacher said" (116). *The Professor* attributes moral faults to the lack of "honest Protestant education" (103) in combination with race. Crimsworth describes some of his students as "a band of inferior-looking Flamandes":

including two or three examples of that deformity of person and imbecility of intellect whose frequency in the Low Countries would seem to furnish proof that the climate is such as to induce degeneracy of the human mind and body. (101)

Numerous other examples could be cited to demonstrate Charlotte's emphasis on the "natural inferiority" of students, which inevitably places the teacher in a position of superiority.

A degree of authority is inherent in any teacher's position but Charlotte's preoccupation is with power. In her novels "good" teachers may be identified by the effectiveness of their classroom management. Those who can establish and maintain silence, suppress wilful students, and instill a certain number of facts are regarded as successful. If they can "restrain the levity natural to youth" (*The Professor*, 100) their actions are commended. Those who cannot rule will be ruled by their pupils, who are quite conscious of the power-game in which they are participating. Crimsworth observes in *The Professor*:

Frances toiled for and with her pupils like a drudge, but it was long ere her conscientious exertions were rewarded by anything like docility on their part, because they saw they had power over her, inasmuch as by resisting her painful attempts to convince, persuade, control - by forcing her to the employment of coercive measures - they could inflict upon her exquisite suffering. Human beings - human children especially - seldom deny themselves the pleasure of exercising a power which they are conscious of possessing, even though that power consist only in a capacity to make others wretched. (131-2)

In this respect Anne Brontë's observation of human-nature is similar. Agnes Grey states that her first pupil, Tom Bloomfield, "not content with refusing to be ruled, must needs set up as ruler", and manifests "a determination to keep, not only his sisters, but his governess in order" (28). However, it is particularly clear in Charlotte's novels that teaching is understood to be a power-struggle which demands domination on one side and submission on the other. The teacher needs to be equipped with "a breast-plate of steely indifference" and a "visor of impossible austerity" (*The Professor*, 86) in this battle of wills. Those who enjoy the occupation do so because of a consciousness of the superiority of their position. Hortense Moore, for example, who, as a foreigner, is rather a misfit in Yorkshire, "delights" in the task of tutoring Caroline Helstone, "because it gave her importance; She liked to lord it over a docile yet quick pupil" (*Shirley*, 87). In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe finds her introduction to teaching exhilarating, and states; "I shall never forget that first lesson, nor all the undercurrent of life and character it opened up to me" (109). Initially this lesson is a "growing revolt of sixty against one" (110) until Lucy tears a pupil's work in two, and locks another girl in a closet. The disgraced student is "dreaded and hated by her associates" so that "the summary act of justice ... proved popular: there was not one present but, in her heart, liked to see it done" (111). Lucy brandishes the key triumphantly. She realises that if she can publicly humiliate students

she is unlikely to have any difficulty with them in the future, or, as Charlotte more bitingly expresses it, if Lucy can "but once make their (usually large) ears burn under their thick, glossy hair, all [will be] comparatively well" (116). William Crimsworth's experiences, in *The Professor*, are similar. He, too, establishes control - or quells a class "mutiny" (88) - by destroying a student's work during his first lesson at Mademoiselle Reuter's school (88), and later removes three students from the classroom, consigning one to a locked *cabinet* (101). "This judgment [was] executed in the presence of Mdlle. Reuter who looked much aghast at beholding so decided a proceeding - the most severe that had ever been ventured on in her establishment" (101).¹

In each of the instances above the teacher's struggle is placed with a wider context of oppression. Hortense finds that in England her habits are "considered ridiculous" and her servants sneer at her (*Shirley*, 75) so that her desire to patronise Caroline is heightened. Lucy Snowe's students accept her discipline because she protects them from the intimidation of one of their peers, but she asserts her authority because she herself wishes to increase her social standing:

After the first few lessons, given amidst peril and on the edge of a moral volcano, that rumbled under my feet and sent sparks and hot fumes into my eyes, the eruptive spirit seemed to subside, as far as I was concerned. My mind was a good deal bent on success: I could not bear the thought of being baffled by mere undisciplined disaffection and wanton indocility, in the first attempt to get on in life. Many hours of the night I used to lie awake thinking what plan I had best adopt to get a reliable hold on these mutineers, to bring this stiff-necked tribe under permanent influence. (*Villette*, 114)

William Crimsworth, a disinherited younger brother, delights in subduing his students. Janet Gezari comments:

Still smarting from the punishment of Edward's drudgery and the humiliation of his scorn, he controls his pupils with calculated displays of anger and derives considerable satisfaction from humiliating them. Like Heathcliff, he responds to social oppression by becoming an oppressor. (44)

¹ Of course, modern readers may be similarly "aghast" at the management techniques Charlotte commends, particularly as the author's callous attitude towards school pupils is evident in every one of her novels.

He and Mdlle. Reuter also engage privately in "a regular drawn battle" for control. She applied "now this test, now that, hoping in the end to find some chink, some niche where she could put in her little firm foot and stand upon [Crimsworth's] neck, mistress of [his] nature" but he "enjoyed the game much and did not hasten its conclusion" (89-90). Later in the novel we observe the pleasure her authority over students and other staff affords her:

She liked - as who would not? - on entering the schoolroom, to feel that her sole presence sufficed to diffuse that order and quiet which all the remonstrances, and even commands, of her underlings frequently failed to enforce. ... Her teachers did not love her, but they submitted because they were her inferiors in everything. The various masters who attended her school were each and all in some way under her influence. (*The Professor*, 104)

Janet Gezari asserts that "all Brontë's masterly men have themselves been victims" (52), and there is clearly a direct connection between a teacher's sense of powerlessness and his or her desire to dominate. We have seen already that in Charlotte's work both male and female teachers bully students in order to assert their authority, but their methods become increasingly sadistic when they feel threatened. This is evident in a number of specific incidents.² In an attempt to ingratiate herself with William Crimsworth, Mdlle. Reuter asks him to undertake the instruction of a new pupil, and to be particularly "considerate with her at first, and not expose her backwardness or inefficiencies before the young ladies, who, in a sense, are her pupils" (116):

... the longer she preached about the necessity of being indulgent to the governess-pupil, the more impatient I felt as I listened. I discerned so clearly that while her professed motive was a wish to aid the dull though well-meaning Mdlle. Henri, her real one was no other than a design to impress me with an idea of her own exalted goodness and tender considerateness; so having again hastily nodded assent to her remarks, I obviated their renewal by suddenly demanding the compositions, in a sharp accent, and ... as I passed the governess-pupil, I said to her, -
"You have come in too late to receive a lesson to-day; try to be more punctual next time." (116-7)

² The examples I have selected are of male teachers' treatment of female pupils, and we shall see in chapter five that the balance of power in educational interactions in Charlotte's work invariably remains with men. However, previous examples cited in this chapter serve to demonstrate that females also adopt similarly vindictive disciplinary practices at times.

Frances Henri becomes the victim of a power-struggle between two others; her first English lesson is humiliating because Crimsworth is "'relentless' to the point of sadism" (Nestor (1987), 44). The cycle of intimidation also affects others in Charlotte's work. Louis Moore, in *Shirley*, is "a satellite of the house of Sympson ... an abstraction, not a man" (513). His role as tutor diminishes his value in the sight of others, increasing his need to "rule" over Shirley. He is deeply aware of his social inferiority and his manner with her is both abrupt and aggressive, but he relishes the struggle for dominance:

I would rather she were a little perverse; it will steel me. I prefer her cuirassed in pride, armed with a taunt. Her scorn startles me from my dreams; I stand up myself. A sarcasm from her eyes of lips puts strength into every nerve and sinew I have. (573)

One consequence of Louis' oppressed position is that he seeks a wife he can "establish power over and then ... be indulgent to" (708). *Villette* provides numerous similar examples, but as these also relate closely to the master-pupil relationships in Charlotte's work (which will be examined in chapter five) reference to one situation will suffice here. Paul Emanuel delivers Dr John's first letter to Lucy and, seething with jealousy, returns to the classroom where he vents his frustrations on the innocent pupils. Lucy discovers him "raging like a pestilence":

Some pupil had not spoken audibly or distinctly enough to suit his ear and taste, and now she and others were weeping, and he was raving from his estrade almost livid. (343-4)

When Lucy praises the doctor's appearance, M. Paul subjects her to verbal abuse and refuses to allow her to leave the schoolroom to attend lunch. She entreats "to be let alone" and when she is not, weeps "bitterly" (333). In each of the cases above, the teacher or tutor involved uses his professional position to overcome a sense of personal inadequacy or inferiority.

To this point we have focused on Charlotte's portrayal of tyrannical teachers, but it is clear within the Brontës' novels that it is not only educators who wield power. Education *in itself* confers power upon those who have it. The possession of learning may provide economic independence, or social status, and may unlock worlds which are inaccessible to the uneducated. Due to the discrepancies between male and female education in Victorian society, such distinctions frequently placed men in an advantageous position. As Philippa Levine states; "Education was more than simply an antidote to the boredom of female middle-class

existence; ignorance spelt continued subordination where education posited the possibility of independence" (28). We will now consider the Brontës' treatment of these issues.

In previous chapters we examined the opportunities available to women with sufficient education, which, although few, were markedly better than the positions available to the uneducated labouring classes. Joan Burstyn records that "more than two million women had some kind of employment in 1851, about one-third of all women in the United Kingdom" (55). Most of these, however, were domestic servants or industrial workers, suffering appalling conditions, working long hours, and being paid a pittance. Access to education was limited. The Factory Act of 1834 had established compulsory school attendance for two hours a day for children in textile mills, but due to the students' extreme fatigue and the teachers' incompetence very little progress was made. The Brontës are silent on such subjects, although glimpses of the lower classes are offered in *Agnes Grey*, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. Nevertheless, their novels demonstrate a consciousness of economic realities for the lower-middle classes they, and their protagonists, came from. Few characters make any pretence of teaching for other than economic reasons. Lucy Snowe frankly admits that she teaches "for the sake of the money" (*Villette*, 266) and this is clearly true of other characters, whether or not it is stated directly. The reader is also alerted to the fact that the education these individuals received empowered them to gain and retain their positions. The alternatives are presented in Frances Henri's circumstances; as a lace-mender she is living on the brink of poverty, but an improvement in her qualifications enhances her economic status significantly. Charlotte advocates education as "a step towards independency" in an age when "one great curse of a female single life is its dependency"³.

Education also empowers people socially. As this is not a central concern for the Brontës (unlike a number of other Victorian novelists) examples are limited. Rosamond Oliver takes "an amiable caprice" to Jane Eyre, once she discovers Jane is fluent in French and German, and is a competent artist. "She was first transfixed with surprise, and then electrified with

³ Letter to William Smith Williams, 3 July 1849, from Shirley Foster's *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (75).

delight" (471). As a consequence, Jane is introduced to Mr Oliver and invited to Vale Hall. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, however, Anne Brontë demonstrates that a consciousness of a "good" education may breed snobbery. Jane Wilson, described as "a young lady of some talents and more ambition" (16), chooses to attend a boarding-school, with the following results:

She had taken the polish well, acquired a considerable elegance of manners, quite lost her provincial accent, and could boast of more accomplishments than the vicar's daughters. ... She had, or might have had many suitors in her own rank of life, but scornfully repulsed or rejected them all; for none but a gentleman could please her refined taste, and none but a rich one could satisfy her soaring ambition. (17)

The Brontës, perhaps not surprisingly, are more concerned with the positive effect of education upon the individual than in improving their social or economic status in society. The joy of learning is seen in Diana and Mary Rivers' pursuit of knowledge. They wish to enhance their prospects as governesses but the pleasure of the learning process is emphasised, as opposed to their brother's relentless zeal for his vocation which drives him, and Jane, to study Hindostanee. Similarly, Lucy Snowe gains considerable satisfaction from her studies without having any "great expectations":

I dearly liked to think my own thoughts; I had great pleasure from reading a few books, but not many ... perceiving well that, as far as my own mind was concerned, God had limited its powers and action - thankful, I trust, for the gift bestowed, but unambitious of higher endowments, not restlessly eager after higher culture. (336)

In this extract one hears echoes of the author's earlier opinions about "proper" feminine behaviour, although Charlotte's life after her authorial identity became public demonstrates an eagerness for "higher culture" which had hitherto been unsatisfied. Nevertheless, while social advancement through education is acknowledged as possible in the Brontës' works, it is not necessarily advocated.

It is self-evident that education grants its possessor knowledge which excludes those who lack it. This places the educated person in a position of power which is often felt keenly by the underdog. We see this in *The Professor* as Edward Crimsworth dismisses his younger

brother's Eton education as "useless trash of college learning" (18). His resentment stems from jealousy and fear, which William recognises:

Had I been in anything inferior to him, he would not have hated me so thoroughly; but I knew all that he knew, and, what was worse, he suspected that I kept the padlock of silence on mental wealth in which he was no sharer. (31)

In this instance the imbalance between the brothers is almost incidental to the rest of Charlotte's novel, but in *Wuthering Heights* Emily Brontë demonstrates a clear-sighted consciousness of the possible consequences of marked discrepancies in education, and develops the issue further. Catherine, who resists the lessons of her childhood which Joseph inflicts, "can hardly be expected ... to sympathise with her husband's studious pursuits" (Banerjee, 35) and Edgar's learning contributes to the lack of understanding and division between them. More significantly, Heathcliff, who is empowered by an education he gains mysteriously beyond the world of the Heights and Thrushcross Grange, deliberately withholds education from Hareton as a mechanism of control, believing that Hareton will "never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance" (267). Later the second Catherine ridicules her cousin's attempts to read, thereby exerting the only power she possesses during her imprisonment at *Wuthering Heights*, while Hareton's desire to learn stems from his recognition that his ignorance is central to Catherine's perception of their inequality:

Shame at her scorn, and hope of her approval were his first prompters to higher pursuits; and instead of guarding him from one, and winning him the other, his attempts to raise himself had produced just the contrary result. (366)

Heathcliff's decreasing control over the second generation is marked by Hareton's developing literacy and the intimacy between Hareton and Catherine which is established simultaneously. In *Jane Eyre* John Reed also recognises that knowledge gives power, and Pauline Nestor observes that he is "in fact right to sense the danger of allowing [Jane] access to his bookshelves" (51) at the start of the novel.

The Brontës were, of course, writing at a time when discrepancies between male and female education were a matter of public debate. The truth of the matter was that men not only had more education than women but that their education was different. As we saw in chapter one,

many areas of knowledge were simply inaccessible to the Victorian woman, and this automatically created (and maintained) an imbalance of power which men were able to exploit. Nestor describes Victorian males as "custodians of learning, dispensing knowledge and selecting books from the libraries they frequently control" (35). This is reflected in each of the Brontës' novels as men impose their attitudes towards art, literature, language, life and education itself upon the women they wish to influence.⁴ Most women submit because the men resent contradiction. This is demonstrated in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* where Gilbert Markham is worsted in an argument about the upbringing of boys and girls; he sulkily observes; "You ladies must always have the last word, I suppose," and gives Helen Graham's hand "a spiteful squeeze" as she departs (31).

Villette provides us with a number of further examples as both Graham Bretton and Paul Emanuel seek to influence Lucy Snowe and use their educational advantages to dictate how she should interpret the world around her. This is particularly true of M. Paul, who lacks Dr. John's social standing, handsome appearance and charm, and must assert himself where he can. Recognising Lucy's paucity of real qualifications, he takes "quiet opportunities of chuckling in [her] ear his malign glee over their scant measure" (335). He offers to teach her, but her education proceeds entirely on his terms. While Lucy struggles with her work M. Paul is "very kind, very good, very forbearing" but any challenge to his superiority draws a defensive response:

When my faculties began to struggle themselves free, and my time of energy and fulfilment came; when I voluntarily doubled, trebled, quadrupled the tasks he set, to please him as I thought, his kindness became sternness; the light changed in his eyes from a beam to a spark; he fretted, he opposed, he curbed me imperiously; the more I did, the harder I worked, the less he seemed content. Sarcasms of which the severity amazed and puzzled me, harassed my ears; there flowed out the bitterest innuendoes against the "pride of intellect". (508)

M. Paul's influence extends beyond the classroom environment. While Victorian women risked male disapproval if they evinced an interest in "masculine" subjects - "speculation in

⁴ Initially Mr Rochester "approves" Jane's art, belittles her musicianship, and attempts to alter her appearance. Ultimately, however, "because he is blind, he must submit to Jane's imaginative recreation of the world, to see as she does, to, perforce, participate in her world" (Bailin, 71). This reverses the "normal" balance of power discussed here.

these topics might damage feminine acquiescence in their divinely appointed role in society" (Rowbotham, 119) - M. Paul apparently feels it is acceptable for him to "indulge in strictures on the dress, both of the teachers and pupils, at Madame Beck's" (315). Lucy regards this as intrusive, but the most power she can exert is to "ignore his presence" (316), a tactic which is not always successful. Encountering Lucy in a public art gallery, where she "dearly liked to be left ... alone" (283), M. Paul proceeds to admonish her for gazing at an "improper" painting of Cleopatra which she has already dismissed mentally as "an enormous piece of claptrap" (285). Lucy questions the double-standards which allow men and other women to "contemplate what no 'demoiselle' ought to glance at" but is met with the professor's "usual absolutism": "He merely requested my silence, and also, in the same breath, denounced my mingled rashness and ignorance" (288). Nevertheless, as Gilbert and Gubar note, Charlotte Brontë effectively uses Lucy's musings about the paintings she has seen to "examine the ridiculous roles men assign women" (Nestor (1992), 46). Although Lucy is silenced Paul Emanuel does not have the last word.

Dr. John, who not only possesses greater social advantages than M. Paul but, at this point in the novel, is more intimate with Lucy, guides Lucy's interpretation of art, but is also willing to listen to her opinions:

It was pleasant also to tell him some things he did not know - he listened so kindly, so teachably; unformalized by scruples lest so to bend his bright handsome head, to gather a woman's rather obscure and stammering explanation, should imperil the dignity of his manhood. (293)

Dr. John's willingness to accept "a woman's ... stammering explanation" stems from the fact that Lucy poses no threat to him; he can afford to condescend because he retains an undisputed position of power. Likewise, in *Shirley*, Robert Moore submits to Caroline Helstone's instruction as he reads *Coriolanus* because he both wishes to please her and is confident of his own superiority. Patricia Spacks insinuates that this sense of superiority is engendered by Caroline's *apparent* submissiveness, but that, in fact, "she never neglects an opportunity to tell Robert what he ought to do" (61), and "in her dependency, [Caroline] can help him, educate him, improve him ... control him" (63). Whether or not one agrees, it is essential to recognise

the extent to which the power-struggle we have already examined is integral to the heterosexual relationships within the novels, which we will explore further in the next two chapters.

Finally, it may be observed that Charlotte Brontë, as an educated Victorian woman, also possesses power which she employs in her writing. At times she parades her knowledge of literature and language with a self-consciousness which is irritating for a reader whose elementary French places her at a disadvantage. One of Charlotte's publishers also criticised *Villette* as "the most uninteresting of all the works of Miss Brontë" on the grounds that "page after page is composed mostly of French, and that sometimes difficult and idiomatic".⁵ The sense of inadequacy Charlotte's ostentatious displays of linguistic prowess instil (and perhaps reveal) may allow modern readers the opportunity to gain a degree of understanding of the powerlessness many Victorian women felt for much of their lives. Patrica Yaeger argues, however, that Brontë's "multivoicedness" (35) is an emancipatory strategy:

One of [her] strategies of disentanglement is to develop a liberatory interest in language that, in this case, involves working with the metaphoric capacities provided by a second language system - a system that can enter into dialogue with the first and help to revise or to divert its misogyny. (53)

Charlotte was only too aware that men's power derived from the fact that "education ha[d] been theirs in so much higher degree; the pen ha[d] been in their hands", as Jane Austen observes in *Persuasion* (223). The Brontës' novels confirm that "the ideal woman was trained to accept the limitations of a woman's sphere" (Burstyn, 36), but the suffering that stems from the protagonists' awareness of their ignorance is comparable only with that induced by the teaching process itself.

⁵ George Smith, writing for *Cornhill Magazine*, July 1873 (Allott, 143).

CHAPTER FOUR

*"Everywhere, we learn only from those whom we love."
(Goethe)*

Education acts as a catalyst in relationships within the Brontës' novels. At its most straightforward it places people in the same physical environment, allowing them to become acquainted. Shared studies may also establish deeper unity of understanding and purpose between characters, just as acceptance of another's teaching often indicates admiration of, or submission to, the teacher. Furthermore, the discussion of literature or art allows even the most repressed or oppressed individuals to move beyond normal limits of propriety to express their desires, often within an isolated and intimate context. This chapter examines the role of education within the close relationships of the Brontës' novels, while chapter five will be devoted to the relationships between masters and pupils in Charlotte's work.

Although it may appear to be self-evident, it must be noted that teaching allows characters in the Brontës' novels to become acquainted with one another. Thus Hortense Moore is assured that her pupil, Caroline, appreciates her "better than anyone else" in the district, not because Caroline is her cousin, but because she "has more intimate opportunities of knowing [Hortense]" (*Shirley*, 77). Victorian women had many other ways of establishing and maintaining friendships with one another, of course, and it is more significant that in the novels members of the opposite sex are introduced and spend regular periods of time together because of education. Even very reserved individuals, such as Richard Wilson and Mary Millward, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, find this fosters intimacy, as Gilbert Markham senses:

As he studied with her father, she had some acquaintance with him, in spite of the retiring habits of both, and I suppose there was a kind of fellow-feeling established between them. (35)

Later in the novel these characters marry one another, as do many others the Brontës portray in similar situations.

Teaching often isolates couples so that they may converse with a degree of privacy rarely available to men and women in Victorian society, and the device is used repeatedly within

Charlotte's work. Louis Moore summons Shirley to the schoolroom where he may engage her in conversations which would be singularly inappropriate in the more public drawing-room. Caroline Helstone encourages Robert to linger by her desk mending her pens and ruling her books, but also visits him alone in his counting-house - normally "a jealously guarded male domain" (Nestor (1987), 72) - where he willingly dissolves the "little difficulties" (*Shirley*, 88) her studies present. Paul Emanuel uses his lessons with Lucy to impart to her his opinions, not only about the miscellaneous subjects he selects at random, but about religion, "women of intellect" (*Villette*, 513), and other matters which impinge directly upon their relationship. The schoolroom allows him complete freedom of expression and also permits a degree of physical intimacy which Lucy is aware her teacher exploits:

I took care not to make too much room for him; he watched with a jealous, side-long look, to see whether I shrank away, but I did not, though the bench was a little crowded. I was losing the early impulse to recoil from M. Paul. (501)

Other relevant examples will be raised shortly, but at this stage I would like to draw attention to some of the parallels between the schoolroom and the sickroom in Victorian fiction. It is evident that the two environments may be used to serve similar functions and consequently an examination of one may illuminate the other.¹

First, as I have already suggested, the schoolroom and the sickroom allow an unusual degree of physical intimacy between their inhabitants, not only because they place people in close proximity but because they exclude others. Miriam Bailin regards the sickroom-visit of Charlotte's fiction as "voluntary seclusion with one's beloved" (69) and certainly the same description may be applied to the private tutoring that occurs so frequently in the novels, as the following passage from *Shirley* illustrates:

Twilight was closing on the diminished autumn day: the schoolroom windows - darkened with creeping plants, from which no high October winds had as yet swept the sere foliage - admitted scarce a gleam of sky; but the fire gave light enough to talk by. (560)

¹ Chapter two of Miriam Bailin's *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, entitled "Charlotte Bronte: Varieties of Pain", provides a thought-provoking discussion of illness in Charlotte's work. Although Bailin makes no reference to education it will be evident that her work suggested the interesting parallels I explore here.

The schoolroom, and teaching interactions themselves, exclude others and prevent unwanted intrusion. Earlier in the novel Caroline Helstone betrays a similar sense of the intimacy of such a situation when she is persuading Robert to read *Coriolanus*: "We want no third - no fourth, I mean (she hastily and with contrition glanced at Hortense), living person among us" (100). In *The Professor* Crimsworth celebrates the fact that tutoring allows him to enjoy "undisturbed" the pleasures of Frances' presence and the sound of her voice, and gives him the opportunity to watch her as she reads to him (175). The isolation that the schoolroom provides for the Brontës' protagonists is accentuated by the fact that all of them are, to a lesser or greater extent, misfits in the society to which they belong. We have already seen this to be true of governesses and tutors and those living in foreign cultures, but characters may also be ostracised because they subscribe to different moral standards from those around them, or they hold a position of poverty or wealth which contrasts with their associates. Without exception the Brontë hero or heroine is an outsider, and the intensity of the relationships he or she ultimately establishes with others is heightened because of the rarity of the occurrence.

The clear demarcation between the schoolroom or sickroom and what is beyond it obviously means that neither environment is a reflection of "the real world", or even has much connection with it. The "perfect concord of the sickroom" (or classroom):

seems predicated on the exorcism of all potential discord in a fusion of identity so secluded from others that it appears invulnerable to rival affections, breaches of trust, or even differences in perception.
(Bailin, 71)

To speculate on the married lives of Shirley and Louis, Frances and Crimsworth, or Lucy and M. Paul is almost impossible, and quite meaningless, because each of these relationships is established within an artificial situation which has removed external pressures. It is difficult to envisage a dreamy tutor efficiently managing Shirley's affairs, or to imagine Frances and William Crimsworth's domestic conversations when their only meaningful communication in the novel appears to occur when literature or teaching is the subject of discussion. The ambiguous ending of *Villette* may signal the author's acknowledgement that physical attraction and mutual intelligence can inspire affection without providing an adequate basis for a marriage in which significant "potential sources of discord" and "differences in perception" remain.

"Drowning and Matrimony are the fearful alternatives"² for the couple whose courtship only rarely approaches anything nearing "perfect concord", and whose religious, cultural, and temperamental differences remain significant potential sources of conflict. The educational context of their courtship has displaced these problems but has not resolved them.

Further characteristics of the fictional sickroom may be applied to the classroom:

The sickroom ... exempts [its inhabitants] from an active role in their own affairs; it attains their willing acquiescence to dependency; it sequesters them from society in closed rooms under a carefully observed regimen, obedient to the authority of the figure in charge. (Bailin, 73)

Although the schoolroom may demand a rather more active response from the pupil than the sickroom requires of a patient Charlotte's pupils often seem satisfied with exploiting the passivity of their role (as we shall see in chapter five) and certainly willingly "acquiesce to dependency". The "carefully observed regimen" of the schoolroom provides structures and guidelines for interactions which facilitate relationships, even for shy or socially inept characters. In *The Professor* William Crimsworth reveals himself to be very uncomfortable in social situations, although he has few opportunities to demonstrate that he is "not ... a block or a piece of furniture, but an acting, thinking, sentient man" (24). At the only large party he attends Crimsworth is "fairly isolated" and can only "contemplate the shining ones from afar, and when weary of such a dazzling scene, turn for a change to the consideration of the carpet pattern" (23). In this instance Crimsworth's inability to interact with others is exacerbated by his social inferiority and his brother's desire to keep him "strictly in the background" (23), but later in the novel Yorke Hunsden refuses to excuse Crimsworth on these counts:

I have remarked you sitting near the door in a room full of company, bent on hearing, not on speaking; on observing, not on entertaining; looking frigidly shy at the commencement of a party, confusingly vigilant about the middle, and insultingly weary towards the end ... if you are generally unpopular it is because you deserve to be so. (204)

Although Crimsworth protests that Hunsden has misjudged him, he fares little better when he is alone with Frances Henri beyond the security of the schoolroom. Initially their interaction is so awkward that Crimsworth finds himself adopting a teacher's "authoritative tone and manner"

² Charlotte Brontë's comment on the ending of *Villette*, in a letter to George Smith, 26 March 1853 (Barker, 723).

(175) and demanding that Frances read to him at length from *Paradise Lost*. Both characters are apparently most at ease within the familiar context of the schoolroom, where roles are prescribed and it is relatively easy to fulfil the expectations of a teacher or pupil. Outside this environment issues of gender, class, etiquette and propriety complicate relationships.

The teaching situation "obliterates conventional social superiority" (Ewbank, 200). Consequently Louis Moore, who is Shirley Keeldar's inferior in everything but education, is accorded equality (and even superiority) of status because he can teach Shirley, has well-balanced judgment, a kind heart, and sound principles (712). Others may regard him as a "vile, insinuating, infamous menial" (716) but his pupil does not. Louis' role as tutor gives him "a natural right and power to sustain her, as a husband should sustain his wife" (593) but it is Shirley's submission to his authority which empowers him. As we shall see shortly, in each of Charlotte's novels a pupil's response to another's instruction provides a significant indicator of the progress of the relationship. Congruence in academic pursuits is always symbolic of deeper unity.

We observed earlier that the Brontës' protagonists are invariably outsiders, so that close relationships within the novels are intense but few. It is therefore striking that many images of affection and fellowship, both between women, and men and women, occur in an educational context. *Jane Eyre* provides us with a number of examples. Jane's first friendship is established on the basis of books as her tentative enquiries about Helen Burns' reading allow her to open a conversation with one of her peers. Later, Miss Temple and Helen's mutual affection is represented by their intellectual compatibility, and Jane feels it is "indeed a privilege to be admitted to hear" their conversations:

They conversed of things I had never heard of; of nations and times past; of countries far away; of secrets of nature discovered or guessed at: they spoke of books: how many they had read! What stores of knowledge they possessed! (85)

"The presence and kindness of her beloved instructress" draws out Helen so that, Jane observes, "her soul sat on her lips" (85). Although the content of their conversation is

apparently academic rather than personal the enthusiasm for learning shared by Helen and Miss Temple is symbolic of deeper fellowship.

Later in the novel Jane rejoices in the "perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles" (446) which she discovers for the first time with Diana and Mary Rivers. Again, teaching and learning leads to intimacy:

Diana offered to teach me German. I liked to learn of her; I saw the part of instructress pleased and suited her; that of scholar pleased and suited me no less. Our natures dovetailed: mutual affection - of the strongest kind - was the result. (447)

The same cannot be said of the interactions between St John and Jane. He demands that she give up her study of German in order to learn Hindustani, and she finds his tuition spiritually crippling:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind ... I daily wished more to please him; but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. (508-9)

We shall see in chapter five that in other master-pupil relationships in Charlotte's novels students willingly submit to instruction and their desire to learn is a mark of admiration and love. Such pupils are happy that their teachers "acquire a certain influence" over them but St John's insistence that Jane accept his tuition, despite her reluctance, is abusive. He uses the lessons as "the first gambit of his plan to marry her" but "the fact that she has no wish whatever to learn Hindostanee [sic] is symbolic of the fact that she has no wish whatever to marry him" (Beer, 101). In Charlotte's novels a pupil's response to instruction is always indicative of her feelings towards her teacher, as William Crimsworth complacently assumes in *The Professor*:

My wife she shall be - that is, provided she has as much, or half as much, regard for her master as he has for her. And would she be so docile, so smiling, so happy under my instruction if she had not? Would she sit at my side, when I dictate or correct, with such a still, contented, halcyon mien? (176-7)

Charlotte Brontë's answer to these questions is obviously a resounding "no", because a significant part of her heroines' wish to learn stems from the fact that doing so enables them to engage the attention and affection of their teachers. As St John Rivers is clearly incapable of

intimacy this incentive is lost: education without love is a barren thing. Lucy Snowe says as much in *Villette*, after an altercation with Paul Emanuel:

His affection had been very sweet and dear - a pleasure new and incomparable: now that this seemed withdrawn, I cared not for his lessons. (510)

So far it would seem that the appearance of education in Charlotte's novels has very little to do with the content of what is studied. We have seen in previous chapters that her concern is not with curricula; however there are a number of occasions when a student's work is described minutely, or even reproduced, by the narrator. In every instance this occurs not because the work is significant in itself, but because it reveals something of the personality and desires of the pupil and attracts the attention or admiration of the teacher. William Crimsworth, for example, approaches Frances' first essay with "an incipient sense of interest" as he anticipates it will allow him "a glimpse of what she really is" and provide "an idea of the nature and extent of her powers" (133). On the basis of this piece of writing, alone, he concludes that she has faculties of "strength and rarity" (137). "It acts on him like a love letter or a declaration of some sort; he values it sentimentally as Louis does Shirley's composition" (Beer, 102). Similarly, Rochester (although not Jane's teacher) seizes upon Jane Eyre's paintings as an indication of her originality and intelligence. In other instances a character's work "triangulates the relation of master and pupil" (Gezari, 54). The mechanism is important in the Brontës' novels because the heroines inhabit a world they accept is hostile to assertive or forward women and consequently take refuge in silence and self-repression.³ Their writing or art removes conventional emotional restraints, as Miriam Bailin observes of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, where:

the central characters' inner emotional and creative lives, denied expression or appropriate object in the external world, are revealed in subtexts - in letters, paintings, student compositions. (59)

M. Paul claims to be the only person who understands Lucy Snowe's true nature. His concern for Lucy is ostensibly academic, but the professor uses the work she produces, and his

³ Susan Meyer's "Words on Great Vulgar Sheets - Writing and Social Resistance in *Agnes Grey*", in *The New Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction*, provides an interesting analysis of "the kind of verbal suppression to which girls and women are disproportionately subjected" (6). Meyer argues that *Agnes Grey*, despite her apparently submissive behaviour, "refuses to be tongue-tied by the social order" (8).

observations of her dramatic and teaching abilities, as a gauge to her personality and feelings. The device is also used in *Shirley*, where Caroline expresses her affection for Robert through the medium of poetry, and Louis is so impressed by a schoolgirl essay of Shirley's that he is able to repeat it "word for word" (547) despite the time that has elapsed since its composition. The story provides encouragement to Louis in the same way that Frances' poem in *The Professor* leads Crimsworth to propose. Juliet Barker comments on the use of students' work in Charlotte's novels:

Three out of four novels contain an essay written by a pupil for her teacher, *Jane Eyre* being the only exception. In each case the essay serves as the midwife of love, the means by which the hero is brought to recognition of the intellectual powers and emotional depth hidden beneath the otherwise unexceptional exterior of an apparently conventional young woman. ... Significantly, in each case, greater prominence is given to the teacher's recognition of the essay than to the pupil's production of it. (419)

Similar devices are used to alert the reader to the emotional depth of characters even when others in the novel are not given the opportunity to read what they have written. We are invited to peruse Louis Moore's diary - to "stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles" (591) - and gain access to thoughts which would otherwise be disguised by his calm subservient behaviour. Anne Brontë's heroine, Agnes Grey, writes poetry which remains private but allows her "to unburden the oppressed and swollen heart" (154), providing the reader with another insight into her state of mind. In each case the act of writing allows individuals to express thoughts and feelings which would otherwise remain repressed.

Reading is also used as a uniting device within the Brontës' works. We have already seen this to be true in *Jane Eyre*, as, from her arrival at Lowood, Jane finds Helen's literacy appealing and aspires to become like the older girl. Books are a symbol of education and culture as well as a key to character. The type of works a person owns or reads is often dwelt on in some detail (Yorke Hunsden's collection is itemised in *The Professor*, for example) but the actions associated with books are even more important. Many books are read, loaned, borrowed, given, taken, or shared within the Brontës' novels, with varying implications. M. Paul lends books, censoring them so that he may educate Lucy Snowe according to his ideal of womanhood (*Villette*, 501). In *Wuthering Heights* "a handsome book wrapped in white paper"

(381) acts as a symbol of a "treaty " ratified between Catherine and Hareton. The reading and exchange of books is also noteworthy in Anne's novels. After much deliberation, Gilbert Markham attempts to give Helen Graham a copy of Scott's *Marmion*, in order to "establish [his] position as a friend" (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 70). His gift is unwelcome because Helen Graham recognises its significance and, as a married woman, is not in a position to respond. The "premature offering ... well-nigh give[s] the death-blow" to Markham's hopes (72). Both Agnes Grey and Edward Weston demonstrate charity by their numerous visits to read to the underprivileged, in contrast with the Murray daughters who promise to do so but send Agnes because they discover it is "too much trouble" (*Agnes Grey*, 100). In the same novel, Rosalie Murray lingers in the lane "with her closed book in one hand" (120) awaiting the arrival of Mr Hatfield, her feigned interest in reading reminiscent of Miss Bingley's in *Pride and Prejudice*.⁴ Rosalie informs Mr Weston that Agnes is "so buried in [her] books that [she] had no pleasure in anything else" (152) in an attempt to relegate her governess to a position which does not threaten her own - a distinct echo of Miss Bingley's dismissal of Elizabeth Bennet as one who is "a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else" (33), and an assertion used for precisely the same reason. Further examples will arise shortly.

As the work students produce provides an insight into their characters it is not surprising that their mental attributes often attract others to them initially. However, in the novels an appreciation of a person's intellect is often equated with physical attractiveness which has hitherto been undetected or unappreciated. Crimsworth muses on this after his proposal to Frances:

I know not whether Frances was really much altered since the time I first saw her; but as I looked at her now, I felt that she was singularly changed for me... It is true Frances' mental points had been the first to interest me, and they still retained the strongest hold on my preference; but I liked the graces of her person too. (227)

He goes on to itemise her physical perfections in such detail that one wonders if Crimsworth is self-deluded or deliberately understating their influence on him, but Brontë clearly intends that

⁴ In her (as yet unpublished) paper, "Miss Jane Austen, Miss Anne Brontë and the Forms of Romantic Comedy", given at the Australasian Victorian Studies Association Conference, 1997, Penny Gay demonstrated Anne Brontë's familiarity with Austen's work, which is also evident here.

intelligence be accepted as conveying beauty. Whether or not this is simply an example of wishful writing on the part of an intelligent but plain woman, it is a recurring idea in Charlotte's novels. Crimsworth describes Frances' intelligence as "beauty" to him (174). Similarly, Helen Burns, in *Jane Eyre*, is animated by her intellectual conversation with Miss Temple, her eyes suddenly acquiring:

a beauty more singular than that of Miss Temple's - a beauty neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance. (85)

The author intends to portray a beauty which is not merely skin-deep, but she also uses educational interactions to accentuate characters' acute awareness of others' physical attributes. Robert Moore, watching Caroline as she reads to him, observes that "her cheek had a colour, her eyes a light, her countenance an expression .. which would have made even plain features striking" but, unlike Charlotte's other heroines, Caroline is far from unattractive:

Each lineament was turned with grace; the whole aspect was pleasing. At the present moment - animated, interested, touched - she might be called beautiful. Such a face was calculated to awaken not only the calm sentiment of esteem, the distant one of admiration, but some feeling more tender, genial, intimate - friendship, perhaps, affection, interest. (*Shirley*, 107)

These feelings and others are inspired by the close proximity educational interactions allow to men and women. One must wonder about the sort of education pupils receive when their tutors' minds are so obviously distracted from the task of teaching. In Charlotte's novels teachers and students are evidently very aware of "the sexual suggestivity of the schoolroom" (Gezari, 53) and numerous examples illustrate how circumstances may be manipulated to both parties' satisfaction. While he accepts Caroline's instruction about Shakespeare Robert Moore not only watches his cousin as she recites but insists that she share his book and follow it as he reads. This allows him to place it between them and to "repose his arm on the back of Caroline's chair" (102) for the evening, leaving Caroline "excited and joyously troubled" (108) at its conclusion. Later in the novel Robert's brother, Louis, insists that Shirley come to the schoolroom where he has a chair "placed in readiness near his own" and, on the desk, a single book for them to share. "Her sweeping curls drooped so low as to hide the page from him" and Louis asks Shirley to put back her hair (546). Shirley's hesitation in responding betrays

her awareness of the tutor's presumption, and her acquiescence is couched in terms that heighten the significance of her actions:

She threw the veil of tresses behind her ear. It was well her face owned an agreeable outline, and that her cheek possessed the polish and the roundness of early youth, or, thus robbed of a softening shade, the contours might have lost their grace. (546)

Although Louis "robs" Shirley of her defences, his intrusiveness is balanced by her own desire to throw them off. Later, conscious of her teacher's scrutiny, Shirley betrays her emotion; "the neck, the clear cheek, forsaken by their natural veil, were seen to flush warm" (555). "Her face, before turned from him, returned towards him" (558) and Louis' "whole nature seemed serenely alight" (560). As Patricia Beer observes, "the schoolroom fairly crackles."⁵

The Professor provides us with further examples, this time from the teacher's perspective.

Crimsworth can barely leave his pupil alone, as he admits:

I stood a good while behind her, writing on the margin of her book. I could hardly quit my station or relinquish my occupation. Something retained me bending there, my head very near hers, and my hand near hers too ... Distasteful effort - to leave what we most prefer. (147)

As is only too evident, even when Crimsworth finally holds Frances on his knee she is "only a little nearer than she had ever been before to one she habitually respected and trusted" (222). It seems that Middle Reuter's doubts about the wisdom of employing such a young male professor in a girls' school (79-80) are not entirely unjustified, especially when one considers the "exquisite pleasure" with which he anticipates entering the "pleasant precincts" of the pensionnat he has been barred from for so long (82). Pauline Nestor notes that:

He contemplates the prospect of confronting the classroom with mounting excitement and once his fantasies have been shattered by the behaviour of the girls, his negative judgements are still expressed in sexually charged terms ... Yet when the girls show any sign of participating in the prevailing sexual ambience Crimsworth condemns their behaviour as 'conceited coquetry and futile flirtation' and 'precocious impurity'. ((1987), 45)

Patricia Beer describes *The Professor* as "a complete example of the artistic identification of sex and tuition" because "the erotic relationship and the tutorial relationship are equated and the plot so shaped as to formulate their integral connection" (101). She would no doubt agree that these

⁵ Patricia Beer makes this observation of *Villette* (103), but it is clearly as applicable to *Shirley*.

connections are also evident in the other novels. As will be evident in my fifth chapter, Brontë perceives the ideal educational relationship as heterosexual and preferably monogamous. For Charlotte, "tuition and sexuality were inextricably linked" (Banerjee, 40).⁶

Although I have emphasised the link between intellect and physical attraction which Charlotte makes in each of her novels, a contrasting perspective is equally legitimate. One may argue that the temporary beauty granted to Brontë's heroines, inspired by intelligent conversations with someone they love, is not of primary importance. The reader of these novels is left with an enduring impression of each heroine's intelligence and determination which eclipses her plain or insignificant appearance and far outweighs any sense of external beauty. The classroom may be an environment of seclusion and intimacy, but it removes the deliberate image-enhancement that occurs in a social setting. Pupils are often seen at their worst, at times of resentment, boredom or bewilderment, as Crimsworth observes in *The Professor*. The following is merely a brief extract from a much longer passage:

A professor does not meet his pupil to see her dressed in satin and muslin, with hair perfumed and curled, neck scarcely shaded by aerial lace, round white arms circled with bracelets, feet dressed for the gliding dance ... No. He finds her in the schoolroom, plainly dressed, with books before her ... In short, to the tutor, female youth, female charms, are like tapestry hangings of which the wrong side is continually turned towards him; and even when he sees the smooth, neat external surface, he so well knows what knots, long stitches, and jagged ends are behind that he has scarce a temptation to admire too fondly the seemingly forms and bright colours exposed to general view. (119-20)

Brontë's teachers are given the opportunity to see young women "as they really are", and while this may prove to be disillusioning (as it is for Crimsworth) it also allows relationships between flawed individuals to be established on the basis of understanding and acceptance. "In this situation can emerge real sympathy, real compatibility; it is how the true choices of life are

⁶ There has been considerable speculation about the relationship between Charlotte Brontë and her "master", Constantin Heger. It is not my intention to explore the psychological basis for, or historical parallels with, the fictional relationships between teachers and students in her novels. Biographers have presented various interpretations of Charlotte's letters to her teacher but his impact upon her life and writing is undeniable. Nevertheless, "the pattern of alternating domination and submission" (which we will explore in the next chapter) "had been a significant feature of the erotic adventures of the juvenilia ... long before she met Heger" (Prentis, 123) and his influence may be over-emphasised.

made" (Beer, 102). Although Crimsworth's narrative cannot be taken at face-value, there is no doubt that Brontë wished the reader to accept that a tutor would "glor[y] chiefly in certain mental qualities: application, love of knowledge, natural capacity, docility, truthfulness, gratefulness". These are "the charms that attract his notice and win his regard" (*The Professor*, 120).

Mental qualities attract. As we saw in chapter one, however, Victorian society did not allow women to be capable of sophisticated reasoning; their minds were kept "narrow and fettered" (*Shirley*, 444) due to their "natural inferiority" (Burstyn, 71). The ramifications of such beliefs are evident in Charlotte's novels in the interactions between men of intellect and education and women of "taste and fancy" (*The Professor*, 137) who have been educationally deprived. As we acknowledged in the previous chapter, this imbalance of nature and level of education invariably creates a proportionate imbalance of power which men capitalise upon. On occasions the heroines bemoan their inferiority, but as we shall see, the author's attitude toward the subject varies. Lucy Snowe, for example, fluctuates in her attitude towards her studies:

There were times when I would have given my right hand to possess the treasures [M. Paul] ascribed to me. ... Oh! why did nobody undertake to make me clever while I was young enough to learn, that I might, by one grand, inhuman revelation - one cold, cruel, overwhelming triumph - have forever crushed the mocking spirit out of Paul Carl David Emanuel! (*Villette*, 512)

Education would grant Lucy power, as she clearly realises, but on the whole she is "unambitious of higher endowments" (336):

What I loved, it joyed me by any effort to content; but the noble hunger for science in the abstract - the god-like thirst after discovery - these feelings were known to me but by the briefest flashes. (508)

She, like Charlotte's other heroines, would prefer to submit to someone of superior intellect than to attain equality with them. Indeed, in Charlotte's novels, the promotion of education for women "is mixed ... not only with resentment at being made to feel inferior, but also a kind of masochistic self-indulgence in that feeling" (Banerjee, 40). Charlotte's ideal does not appear to

be educational equality. In the next chapter we shall endeavour to ascertain what she advocates in its place.

CHAPTER FIVE

*"Slaves and schoolboys often love their masters."
(George Bernard Shaw)*

Relationships between teachers and pupils are central to three of Charlotte Brontë's novels (*The Professor*, *Shirley* and *Villette*) and the author uses the educational context to explore the roles of men and women in society as a whole. Inga-Stina Ewbank observes that Charlotte "is not just making plot use of the fact that many intelligent girls fall in love with their teachers" but "the teaching-situation is Charlotte Brontë's favourite version of the love-and-power-game" (199). The three novels raise a number of questions about the way men and women relate and what constitutes a desirable marital relationship. Whether or not these questions are resolved is a matter of considerable debate, and the latter part of this chapter will present a number of conflicting critical views of Brontë's treatment of the subject as well as my own responses to others' analyses. First it is my intention to outline some of the significant issues associated with the master-pupil relationships in Charlotte's work, then examine these relationships in each of *The Professor*, *Shirley* and *Villette*. The chapter will conclude with reference to *Jane Eyre* and Anne Brontë's novels. In every part of this investigation my aim is not so much to comment on issues of sexuality and power (which have been explored by others) but to emphasise the fact that education plays a pivotal role in the central relationships of Charlotte Brontë's fiction.

The teacher-pupil relationships explored in Charlotte's work are always between male teachers and female students, even when the students are themselves teachers. There is no suggestion that Frances Henri or Lucy Snowe could become involved with a male student, not only because their pupils are all girls but because the balance of power the author approves would be upset if men were placed in a subservient position. As the previous chapters have illustrated, education grants power to its possessor and the ability to impart or withhold knowledge places the teacher in a position of undisputed privilege. In Victorian society men undoubtedly held this superior position, but Charlotte's attitude towards it is ambivalent. While she advocates independence for women and insists on their equality with men her heroines appear to fear

accepting the power that is potentially within their reach. They "want independence, but they also desire to dominate; and their desire to dominate is matched only by their impulse to submit to a superior will" (Eagleton, 30). In fact their desire to dominate is *exceeded* by their impulse to submit. Jacqueline Banerjee asserts that "Charlotte Brontë's typical heroine has a deep need to feel mastered" (40) and other writers agree:

Miss Brontë was a great upholder of the privileges of her sex, yet no writer in the world has ever so uniformly represented women at so great a disadvantage. They invariably fall victims to the man of strong intellect, and generally muscular frame, who lures them on with affected indifference and simulated harshness; by various ingenious trials assures himself they are worthy of him, and, when his own time has fully come, raises them with a bashaw-like air from their prostrate condition, presses them triumphantly to his heart, or seats them on his knee, as the case may be, and indulges in a condescending burst of passionate emotion. (W.C Roscoe, in Gezari, 51)

Roscoe's suggestion that Brontë's women "fall victim" to men of strong intellect implies that their participation in such relationships is unwilling, or, at best, passive, but as we shall see most of her heroines are not reluctantly submissive but "insist" upon their husbands controlling them (*Shirley*, 706). The contradictions embodied in this demand are the concern of the present chapter.

Brontë's "men of strong intellect" are teachers, professors, or tutors, but, significantly, are invariably called "master" by their female pupils. The Oxford English Dictionary includes a number of entries for this word, some of which may prove illuminating when we consider Brontë's preference for the term. A master is:

- + A teacher; one qualified to teach
- + A man having control or authority
- + The owner of a living creature, as a dog, horse, slave; also the man whom an animal is accustomed to obey
- + He whose disciple one is; the teacher ... from whom one has chiefly learned, or whose doctrine one accepts

In July 1844, Charlotte wrote to her former teacher, Constantin Heger, addressing him as "the only master I ever had" (Barker, 441). It is a phrase which resonates with all the meanings above and has provided Brontë commentators with considerable scope for speculation, and fuel for amateur psychoanalysis, ever since its publication. As Wendy Craik notes, "M. Heger

lurks at the back of every critic's mind" (101). Charlotte's letters to Heger show "servile and self-debasing devotion" (Barker, 445) which parallels relationships in the juvenilia and can be used to explain the author's motivation (whether conscious or otherwise) in her portrayal of master-pupil relationships in her adult fiction. In a letter dated 8 January 1845, Charlotte demonstrates that "she had no wish to Monsieur Heger's equal: she wanted to be his inferior - even his slave" (Barker, 445):

If my master withdraws his friendship entirely from me I will be completely without hope - if he gives me a little - very little - I will be content - happy, I will have a reason for living - for working - Monsieur, the poor do not need much to live - they only ask for the crumbs of bread which fall from the rich man's table - but if one refuses them these crumbs of bread - they die of hunger - Nor do I need much affection from those I love - I would not know what to do with an absolute and complete friendship ... (Barker, 444)

However, the fact that relationships in the juvenilia are similarly one-sided, despite being devised before Charlotte and Emily studied in Brussels, would suggest that Heger fulfilled rather than inspired Charlotte's ideal. Her earlier response to a marriage proposal from Henry Nussey, in 1839, is also enlightening. In explaining her rejection to his sister, Ellen, Charlotte gives some indication of her priorities in marriage:

Do I love Henry Nussey as much as a woman ought to love the man her husband? Am I the person best qualified to make him happy? Alas Ellen my conscience answered 'no' to both these questions ... I had not, and never could have that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him - and if I ever marry it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my husband. (Barker, 301)¹

Her wishes clearly correspond with those of the fictitious Shirley, who insists, "Before I marry I am resolved to esteem - to admire - to *love* ... to love with my whole heart" (533). Barbara Prentis submits a theory which is representative of the psychological criticism which abounds among Brontë commentators endeavouring to analyse Charlotte's complex attitudes toward relationships:

¹ In a letter dated 20 November 1840 Charlotte gives Ellen advice which may appear to contradict these earlier views, but it is based on her assessment of Ellen as someone who "will never love before marriage". She urges Ellen not to wait "for the awakening of .. 'une grande passion'". "On one hand don't marry if you are certain you cannot tolerate the man on the other hand don't refuse because you cannot adore him" (Barker, 350). (Of course, Charlotte herself eventually married a man she did not "adore" and was evidently very happy.)

This unvarying compulsion to place her heroines in some kind of willing subjection to a dominant male suggests that within Charlotte herself there might well have been a subconscious reluctance to assume the responsibility of an adult and equal male/female relationship. (94)

Some attribute Charlotte's "unvarying compulsion" to the influence of Heger, some to Patrick Brontë, and some, even, to Byron.² The real issue here, however, is not the cause of Brontë's fixation with relationships between masters and pupils, but the consequence of their use within her writing.

For many readers, especially those who wish to interpret the novels from a feminist standpoint, the "insistent emphasis on love, on the notion that only through a passionate relationship with a man can a woman find happiness" is "a serious limitation in Charlotte Brontë's understanding of what women's lives could be" (Stubbs, 29). This is particularly problematical when the man is "masterful" in the manner defined by the Oxford English Dictionary; "addicted to acting the part of master, accustomed to insist on having [his] own way; imperious, self-willed, overbearing". According to Patricia Stubbs:

This collapse of her heroines' independence into welcome submission within the conventional marriage relationship (always preceded by the tell-tale master-pupil relationship) creates a serious rupture in the texture of the novels. (29)

We will now turn to the three works in which relationships between teachers and pupils feature so prominently, and examine the validity of Stubbs' claim.

The Professor

Charlotte's first novel, *The Professor*, was originally entitled *The Master*. As we have seen, its narrator is a young teacher whose classroom practices often appear to be ruthless and vindictive. Pauline Nestor observes that Crimsworth "uses humiliation as his most powerful disciplinary weapon with his female pupils" and, at times, is "relentless to the point of sadism" ((1987), 44). In chapter three we noted that Crimsworth's desire to dominate in the classroom is exacerbated by a sense of personal inadequacy which drives him to overcompensate for a

² Juliet Barker examines Monsieur Heger's influence upon Charlotte in some detail (chapter 15 of *The Brontës*) but also refers to the Brontës' admiration for Byron (213, 220, and elsewhere). Barker's work argues against formerly widely held views that Patrick Brontë ruled his household and daughters tyrannically.

lack of power in other areas of his life. Here, we examine the implications of his masterful attitudes and actions as they affect his relationship with Frances Henri.

It could be argued that Crimsworth's classroom management techniques have no direct relevance to outside circumstances or relationships because they are deliberately employed in order that he may maintain discipline. In other words, he is simply adopting the role of master, and his actions give us no real indication of his true character. Crimsworth frequently comments on the techniques he uses quite consciously to suppress the students he invariably regards as adversaries:

I endeavoured to throw into my accents the compassionate tone of a superior being, who, touched by the extremity of the helplessness which at first only excited his scorn, deigns at length to bestow aid.
(64)

He humbles his pupils "by a demeanour of consistent coolness" (118), "mask[s] [his] visage with indifference" (127), is "austere and magisterial" (138), and adopts a manner of "calculated abruptness" (143). By doing so he establishes and retains control.

What is more disturbing is that Crimsworth continues to relate to Frances in a similar way once their formal association as teacher and pupil is terminated. He believes that "an authoritative tone and manner" has a "composing effect" upon her (175), and that by giving her curt directions or uttering reproofs he causes her to "nestle into a nook of happiness" (177). He claims that they continue to meet "as master and pupil - nothing more" (216-7) and endeavours to retain "the frost of the master's manner" (222) until a few moments before he proposes. One is inclined to feel some concern about Frances' welfare when, as Nestor claims, Crimsworth:

... jealously holds onto his power, unwilling to relinquish the advantages it provides. He consistently defines himself as Frances' 'master' even after she has left the school and found a job and he remains unemployed. ((1987), 44)

The master-pupil relationship provides the framework for Crimsworth's proposal. Just as he judges Frances' willingness to marry him on the basis of her behaviour as his student (see

chapter four) she assesses Crimsworth's potential as a husband in terms of his treatment of her as her "master":

Monsieur, sera-t-il aussi bon mari qu'il a été bon maître? ... C'est à dire, monsieur sera toujours un peu entêté, exigeant, volontaire - (223)

Despite his overbearing manner, Frances accepts Crimsworth because she is his "dévouée élève" (224) and she is apparently willing to submit to his authority. After their marriage she never makes "any change of importance" without Crimsworth's "cognizance and consent", continuing to make him "still the master in all things" (252). Whether this creates "a serious rupture in the texture of the novel", as Stubbs suggests, remains to be seen.

Crimsworth may "jealously hold onto his power", as Nestor asserts, but he insists that "slavish homage" (129) disgusts him. He treats Middle Reuter with contempt because she tries too hard to please him:

She almost cringed to me on every occasion; she consulted my countenance incessantly, and beset me with innumerable little officious attentions. Servility creates despotism ... I had ever hated a tyrant; and, behold, the possession of a slave, self-given, went near to transform me into what I abhorred! (129, 184)

Frances Henri's submission is not so absolute, and her occasional defiance makes Crimsworth "her subject, if not her slave" (177) although he makes certain she is unaware of his sentiments. In fact he claims to idolise his pupil, seeing her as an "ideal of the shrine in which to seal [his] stores of love" (169), and is painfully conscious of the "humility of [his] position and the inadequacy of [his] means" (174). He obviously believes that in addressing her as his pupil he is using a term of endearment, not belittling her abilities or behaving tyrannically: "Never had I addressed her but as 'mademoiselle' before, and to speak thus was to take up a tone new to both her and me" (169). Despite his regard for Frances, though, one may question how much power Crimsworth allows her.

Frances is so different under different circumstances that Crimsworth seems to "possess two wives" (250). At the point of their engagement she is apparently willing to accept Crimsworth's masterful control - her acquiescence is, rather unfortunately, expressed in the image of Frances being "as stirless in her happiness as a mouse in its terror" (224) - but she

also insists that she must retain her employment as a teacher. Crimsworth protests that she is "laying plans to be independent" of him (225) and Frances agrees. She refuses to be an "incumbrance" or "burden" and demands that she may continue in her "efforts to get on" by means which are as "unrestrained" as his (225). Later Frances proposes to open her own school and Crimsworth recognises his wife's need for fulfilling employment:

I knew she was not one who could live quiescent and inactive, or even comparatively inactive. Duties she must have to fulfil, and important duties; work to do, and exciting, absorbing profitable work. Strong faculties stirred in her frame, and they demanded full nourishment, free exercise. (248-9)

Frances becomes increasingly assertive as "Madame the Directress" (250) of an educational establishment, apparently achieving an effortless balance between her paid employment and domestic responsibilities, including motherhood.

This may seem commendable (if not ideal) to twentieth century readers but it is only half the story. Every act of independence on Frances' part is diminished by Crimsworth's masterful response. Every plan Frances formulates must be approved or agreed to by her husband and it is quite clear that without his approbation she could not or would not proceed. His "consent" may be benignly granted but it is always sought, as we see in an example which follows Frances's proposal to open a school of her own:

"You have conceived a plan, Frances," said I, "and a good plan; execute it. You have my free consent, and wherever and whenever my assistance is wanted, ask and you shall have." (198)

Here Crimsworth not only continues to relate to Frances as her "master", ponderously and condescendingly, but in his appropriation of biblical phraseology also elevates himself to near deity.

Furthermore, Frances's assertiveness is restricted to certain "discreet moments which do not inform - or transform - the rest of [her] life" (Nestor (1987), 48). When Crimsworth enters her classroom she is almost silenced and addresses him with "an air of marked deference" (252) which he finds most flattering. Returning from work "the lady directress vanishe[s]" completely (252) as Frances immediately becomes as docile and submissive as the master

expects. After eight years of marriage she persists in addressing her husband as "monsieur" or even "Professor Crimsworth" (256) and he continues to teach her in the evenings, exercising discipline if she speaks her own language or defies him, even in jest:

I used to turn upon her with my old decision, and arrest bodily the spirit that teased me ... I made her get a book and read English to me for an hour by way of penance. I frequently dosed her with Wordsworth in this way, and Wordsworth steadied her soon. (253)

If she lapses into "vivacity", "mirth" or "originality" Crimsworth rebukes her, only to find he has "seized a mere vexing fairy, and found a submissive and supplicating little mortal woman" (253) in her place. Perhaps this is simply the logical consequence of marrying one who is "accustomed to obedience": Charlotte Brontë only allows the reader to speculate about the post-marital relationships of other masters and pupils in *Shirley* and *Villette*.

There appears to be a contradiction, not simply tension, between the independence and submissiveness of Charlotte's heroine. It is difficult to reconcile the two aspects of her character because:

Brontë makes no real attempt at synthesis, at reconciling conflicting awareness or, most importantly, at seeing the conflict as a conscious dilemma for the heroine. Rather Frances exists as a split character, in accordance with Crimsworth's perception that he has 'two wives'. (Nestor (1987), 48)

An alternative (somewhat cynical) view, however, is that Frances's submissiveness is simply "subtle diplomacy aimed at getting the best of both worlds" (Foster, 83). It is possible to argue that it is Frances's "pleasure, her joy to make [Crimsworth] still the master in all things" (252) because it is the most effective method she can employ to get what she wants. Certainly she openly informs Crimsworth that had he proved to be a "harsh, envious, careless man - a profligate, a prodigal, a drunkard or a tyrant" she would have left him "suddenly and silently"³ (255). Despite Crimsworth's hectoring, masterful manner, however, Charlotte Brontë obviously intends the reader to accept Crimsworth's claim that he is "a good, just, and faithful husband" (255) at face value. She would undoubtedly be astonished by the alternative reading

³ It is Anne Brontë's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which fully explores the issues Charlotte makes cursory reference to here.

of her text suggested above although *Shirley* and *Villette* also provide scope for similar interpretations, as we shall see.

Pauline Nestor observes that "the more disturbing elements" of *The Professor* are "not confronted in the book's conclusion":

The work demonstrates the beginnings of Brontë's conviction of the need for equality and respect between men and women and in the account of the arrangements of Crimsworth's and Frances's respective schools Brontë gestures at an ideal of mutuality. However at this stage of her career the tensions that exist within characters appear as fragmentation, not as duality. ((1987), 48)

The relationship between Crimsworth and Frances which is established and maintained in terms of master-pupil roles remains problematical for the modern reader but the difficulties are even more difficult to resolve in the second novel in which the master-pupil relationship features prominently.

Shirley

It may seem, initially, that the master-pupil relationship which exists in *Shirley* is very different from that in *The Professor*. The dominant partner, in many ways, is the pupil, whose wealth, beauty, intelligence and independence are continually emphasised, while the master's influence is felt only late in the novel. Indeed, Louis Moore does not appear until the twenty sixth of thirty seven chapters, and even then is portrayed as a rather shadowy subservient figure whose "faculties seemed walled up in him and were unmurmuring in their captivity" (513). Furthermore, he is placed at a disadvantage because Shirley is a former pupil with whom he no longer has any professional association and over whom he cannot presume to have any authority.

From this description it may appear that Charlotte Brontë has inverted many of the features of the master-pupil relationship which I have suggested provide its appeal to her. Louis Moore's desire to be "first tutor and then husband" (702) of the woman he loves follows the pattern established in *The Professor* but is met here with a scathing reception from the person he proposes to teach. "Captain" Shirley Keeldar is a twenty one year old heiress with a "sprightly

spirit" (217), not an impressionable schoolgirl. The fact that her independence eventually "collapses ... into welcome submission" to her former tutor does indeed prove to be problematical for the reader, as Stubbs suggests.

Throughout the novel Shirley is presented as a powerful public figure. Her influence over others is seen in her interactions with clergy, industrialists and employees as well as her own friends and family. Others in the community defer to her opinions because of her superior position and her skill in managing, or even manipulating, people. For example, her decision to become more charitable and distribute some of her wealth amongst the poor of Briarfield ultimately results in the local clergy entering "so fully into the spirit of her plans as to head the subscription-list with their signatures for 50/ each" (307). The control that Shirley exerts in this situation, despite her protestation that her philanthropic scheme is "only an outline - a mere suggestion" and her request that the gentlemen are to draw up their own rules, evidently disturbs one of the rectors:

Helstone glanced sharply around with an alert, suspicious expression, as if he apprehended that female craft was at work, and that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence, and make itself of too much importance. ... At last he muttered, 'Well, you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I'll be led for once; but mind - I know I *am* led. Your little female manoeuvres don't blind me.' (305-6)

Shirley's "female manoeuvres" are frequently employed but masculine characteristics and epithets are also ascribed to her to underscore the position of power she holds. She enjoys being addressed as "Captain Keeldar" and continually refers to herself in the third person as male despite the objections to this practice made by her former governess. By doing so Shirley acknowledges that masculinity is a significant component of power which she lacks, but the fact that men in the novel grudgingly admire the "well-tempered mettlesome heart under [her] girl's ribbon sash" (374) - they perceive her as being *almost* "as good as a man" - demonstrates how successfully she has arrogated masculine power to herself.

In her personal relationships Shirley is generally as dominant as in her public duties, and it is this fact which makes her submission in marriage remarkable. Her closest friend, Caroline

Helstone, is "gentle" and "tractable" (408) and obeys Shirley even when the elder girl's wishes oppose her own. Caroline thanks Shirley for preventing her from assisting the injured Robert Moore on the evening his mill is attacked by rioters, although on this occasion Shirley has seemed, by her own admission, "hard" (392), and Caroline has initially objected to her interference. In less weighty matters Caroline is invariably compliant and docile. Shirley's uncle and former guardian, Mr Sympson, also submits to Shirley's wishes but with greater resistance. He accuses her of having a taste for "swaggering, and subduing, and ordering, and ruling" (626) and she agrees with him unashamedly while denying emphatically that she would wish to rule a husband in the manner she controls others. Events in the novel nevertheless demonstrate the influence Shirley has over men. She receives seven proposals of marriage⁴ which are prompted by her personal attributes and her wealth. As the narrator observes, "it appear[s] that Miss Keeldar - or her fortune - had by this time made a sensation in the district" (534).

Having placed such emphasis on Shirley's independence and authority Charlotte Brontë is faced with a difficult task in making her heroine's marriage to a menial tutor seem desirable or even plausible. The author clearly believes, however, that Louis Moore's role as teacher grants him the authority necessary to "master" Shirley. Miss Keeldar may be his superior in all things except education, but as Patricia Beer observes, "in being a teacher [Louis] has the greatest advantage that any Brontë hero could have" (99). We saw in chapter four that teaching "obliterates conventional social superiority" (Ewbank, 200) and Louis himself apparently feels his occupation justifies his actions and therefore capitalises quite consciously on his former relationship with Shirley. Like Crimsworth, he consistently defines himself as Shirley's master despite the fact that it is two years since she was tutored by him.⁵ She seeks a

⁴ Samuel Fawthrop Wynne, Sir Philip Nunnely, Robert and Louis Moore, and three unnamed "more or less eligible" suitors (534) propose to Shirley. Mr Donne, curate of Whinbury, also contemplates doing so before he is evicted ignominiously from Shirley's house in chapter 15.

⁵ Inga-Stina Ewbank notes that it as Shirley's tutor that Louis "feels he can claim Shirley" (199). Her discussion of the role of teaching in relationships in Charlotte's work is insightful. See *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early Victorian Novelists* (198 - 202).

relationship in which she can submit, and he establishes his superiority by remarking on her deficiencies and correcting her faults. He sees them as "the steps by which [he] can mount to ascendancy over her" (593):

I delight to find her at fault; and were I always resident with her, I am aware she would be no niggard in thus ministering to my enjoyment. She would just give me something to do, to rectify - a theme for my tutor lectures. (594)

Modern readers of the novel may question the desirability of a marriage which is based on a man's ambition to lecture and rebuke his wife, preferring notions of equality or mutual support, but we must accept, again, that the author's ideal may be different from our own. Shirley Keeldar frequently reiterates that she will not accept a man "who cannot hold [her] in check", and declines Sir Philip Nunnely's proposal decisively on these grounds:

He is very amiable - very excellent - truly estimable; but *not my master* - not in one point. ... Did I not say I prefer a *master* - one in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good; one whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge; a man whose approbation can reward, whose displeasure punish me; a man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear? (626-7)

The italics above are the author's own and her preoccupation with "masterful" men is evident here as it is in other remarks made by the novel's eponymous heroine. Shirley informs her uncle that she will only "promise to obey" under the conviction that she will be able to keep her promise (627) but her views are complex. She distinguishes between voluntary submission and enforced obedience; her husband is "not to be [her] baby" (706) nor "a tyrant" (627). Nevertheless, by her own admission, "any man who wishes to live in decent comfort" with Shirley "must be able to control [her]" (627).

There are two significant difficulties posed by Shirley's expectations of marriage. The first, as we have already acknowledged, is that the heroine's wishes reflect her author's ideals but do not necessarily correlate with the desires of many readers of the novel. The second problem is that, once her views on marriage have been expressed, Shirley chooses to marry a man she hopes she can obey but little evidence is provided in the text to suggest that her choice will prove to be satisfactory. Charlotte Brontë repeatedly endeavours to demonstrate that Louis and Shirley's attitudes to marriage are complementary but, in the process, uses disturbing imagery.

Louis professes to see a wife as "something to tame first, and teach afterwards: to break in, and then to fondle ... to establish power over, and then to be indulgent to" (707-8). One hears echoes of Shakespeare's Petruchio but Brontë's intention is not comic. More importantly, Louis receives a co-operative response with less resistance. Shirley extends the tutor's metaphor:

I am glad I know my keeper, and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose.
(711)

The images of confinement and restriction which follow - she is "fettered", "conquered" and "bound" (729) - create "the sense that Shirley is somehow reduced in her relationship with Louis" (Nestor (1987), 79), yet other characters express approval of the marriage which Brontë obviously expects her readers to applaud also. Mrs Pryor is convinced that "such a choice will make the happiness of Miss Keeldar's life" (691) while Robert Moore believes that Shirley and Louis are "cut out for each other" and that his brother "will manage her if anyone can" (732). Charlotte Brontë evidently wishes the reader to accept that if anyone *can* manage a strong-willed woman it will be a strong-minded teacher.

In *Shirley*, as in *The Professor*, the marriage proposal is expressed in terms of the professional association which has preceded it. It would be hard to distinguish which book the following words were taken from if it were not for the fact that there is a great deal more French in the first novel: "'My pupil,' I said. 'My master,' was the low answer.'" (*Shirley*, 709). The relationship of domination and submission which the author believes is inherent in teacher-pupil interactions, as we observed in chapter three, is immediately transferred to, and provides the framework for, the marriage which follows. Undoubtedly Shirley's awareness of this encourages her to accept Louis' proposal, but the power-imbalance she claims to desire possibly also contributes to her reluctance to prepare for her wedding or even set a date for it. When Louis presses her to finalise their plans her unromantic response is to cry, "any change will be for the worse!" (721). As Pauline Nestor observes, this "sounds ominous, especially at the end of a novel which has presented a gallery of failed and unhappy marriages" ((1987), 79). Marriage "is portrayed as unsatisfactory at best, self-destructive and enslaving at worst"

(Bailin, 55). Shirley's procrastination allows her to retain power, which, once the wedding date is fixed, she deliberately relinquishes:

She furthered no preparations for her nuptials; Louis was himself obliged to direct all arrangements; he was virtually master of Fieldhead, weeks before he became so nominally. ... She abdicated without a word or a struggle. (730)

Patricia Beer suggests that:

In the spirit and independence of its heroine *Shirley* demonstrates the potential of woman, but at the end the heroine dwindles into a tiresome neurotic who keeps putting off her wedding day for no good reason and who, when asked to shoulder any responsibility, simply says, "Go to Mr. Moore; ask Mr. Moore." (88)

However, Shirley's actions can be interpreted very differently. The reader is informed that Miss Keeldar, in forcing Louis "to assume paramount character ... partly yielded to her disposition" but "partly also acted on system. ... Louis would never had learned to rule, if she had not ceased to govern" (730). It seems, therefore, that Shirley is employing the same strategy we saw in operation when she allowed the local clergy to assume responsibility for charitable plans she had already formulated. Paradoxically, Shirley's voluntary submission to her teacher stems from her position of independence as she "demonstrates her power most fully by making her lover exercise power" (Spacks, 70). Her "subtle diplomacy" (which Patricia Stubbs claimed Frances Crimsworth employs) simply masks her ability to manage others.

The difficulty of reconciling the heroine's attitudes is not only felt by the reader but is commented upon by characters within *Shirley*. She is accused of being "vastly inconsistent", full of "self-contradiction" (626), one moment "like a modest child" and the next "pale and lofty as a marble Juno" (557). Similarly, criticisms of inconsistency have been applied to the author: In this novel "the overall effect is not so much a sense of balance as of uneasy veering" (Nestor (1987), 80). Here, as in *The Professor*, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates "that superior intelligence, as exhibited and put to use in the relationship between master and pupil, is a powerful aphrodisiac" (Ewbank, 198) but in focusing upon the relational aspect of tuition she does not address the problems of educational inequality or other contemporary issues raised earlier in the book, so that, ultimately, "the sombre uneasiness of the conclusion reads like a tacit recognition of the inadequacy of the novel's compromises" (Nestor (1987), 82).

Villette

In *The Professor* an English teacher is employed within a foreign culture, and Charlotte Brontë returns to and develops this subject in *Villette*. The most significant relationship in this novel, however, is not a by-product of daily classroom interactions - the protagonists' "acquaintance starts inauspiciously, and as long as they are merely colleagues in the same teaching-establishment it does not develop very far" (Ewbank, 201) - but is consciously cultivated when the professor offers to instruct his fellow teacher. One might assume that as difference in status is reduced Brontë would present us with an image of intellectual compatibility and partnership. Although there are significant gestures towards equality in *Villette* the master's treatment of his pupil is in fact more harsh and disturbing than either Crimsworth's or Moore's. The teacher is threatened by the abilities of his pupil, portrayed as autocratic and domineering, likened to Napoleon Bonaparte in his "love of power" and "eager grasp after supremacy" (506), and described as being "of the order of beings who must not be opposed, unless you possessed an all-dominant force sufficient to crush him all at once" (191). Like Louis Moore, M. Paul Emanuel revels in his pupil's inadequacies - "a knot of blunders was sweet to him as a cluster of nuts" (503) - and puts considerable energy into keeping his pupil in check.

Lucy Snowe, like Frances and Shirley, is apparently ruled by her master, and it is easy to recognise the author's established attitudes towards relationships. In fact, "from the moment when M. Paul Emanuel begins to insult Lucy Snowe, we give up her heart as gone".⁶ Despite M. Paul's irrational criticisms and impossible demands she returns, time after time, for more of the same treatment. Yet Lucy's response is not unequivocal surrender. She tolerates verbal abuse, emotional blackmail, and even physical discomfort but the reader is given insight into her attitudes towards the professor which distinguish her from Brontë's previous heroines:

He was man not always to be submitted to. Sometimes it was needful to resist; it was right to stand still, to look up into his eyes and tell him that his requirements went beyond reason - that his absolutism verged on tyranny ... I listened to him, and did not trouble myself to be too submissive; his occupation would have been gone, had I left him nothing to 'keep down'. (506, 526)

⁶ Contemporary review of *Villette* in *Athenæum*, 12 February 1853 (Allott, 86).

One has the sense that Lucy is humouring her teacher through her co-operation; even condescending. Certainly her willingness to submit is partly policy. She also places limits on M. Paul's control, as can be seen when he demands that she participate in a school production. Despite her customary reserve she allows herself to be persuaded to learn a role, and is locked in a stuffy attic without food (but with beetles and a large rat) until she has done so. Having suffered these indignities Lucy emerges, only to flatly refuse to dress herself in "masculine vestments": "M. Paul might storm, might rage: I would keep my own dress" (193). It may seem rather late in the day to rebel but when she eventually does so Lucy is victorious.

It has been observed that M. Paul's "urge to dominate, inspires [Lucy's] resistance" (Moglen, in Nestor (1992), 19):

It is his ridicule that forces her to achieve, pokes her into development, deprives her of the somnolence of ladyhood, its small ambitions, timidity and self-doubt. (Millett, in Nestor (1992), 33)

It is also true that M. Paul's "urge to dominate" is less evident once he is sure of his pupil's affection. He grows "hourly better and kinder", his manner becomes "home-like and mild" as he inquires into her plans for the future, "feelings of union and hope made themselves profoundly felt in the heart", and Lucy exclaims:

What quiet lessons I had about this time! No more taunts on my 'intellect', no more menaces of grating public shows! How sweetly, for the jealous gibe, and the more jealous, half-passionate eulogy, were substituted a mute, indulgent help, a fond guidance, and a tender forbearance which forgave but never praised. (639)

M. Paul's aggression forces Lucy to strive for success - "his injustice stirred in me ambitious wishes - it imparted a strong stimulus - it gave wings to aspiration" (508-9) - but his love empowers her to achieve it. He is pleased with Lucy's plan to open her own school (one is reminded of Crimsworth's approval of Frances' scheme) and generously gives her the opportunity to do it. His gift of the "Externat de demoiselles", complete with named prospectuses, has been interpreted in conflicting ways which are typical of the wider debate concerning the "love-and-power-game" in Charlotte Brontë's work. For this reason the possible interpretations of M. Paul's actions are worth some examination.⁷

⁷ The many possible interpretations of Charlotte Brontë's work draw attention to the role of the reader in interpreting a text's meaning. Brenda Silver's "The

First, M. Paul's gift may be taken at face value as a tangible expression of love. Once he has "learnt to recognise her as an *individual*, with a mind and intelligence of her own" (Ewbank, 201) he enthusiastically promotes her plans and dreams, and his assistance grants Lucy the opportunity for economic independence and emotional freedom. He establishes the school but her own savings ensure its viability. She loves her new circumstances and "wonderfully changed life" (712) and the school grows in proportion to her reputation. Her "legacy" is not merely financial; M. Paul has given her "hope for the future, such a motive for perseverance, a laborious, an enterprising, a patient and a brave course" (712). Lucy has, in fact, the "interesting and profitable occupation" and "field in which [her] faculties may be exercised and grow" (*Shirley*, 441, 443) that Caroline Helstone so ardently desired.

However, although Lucy's externat flourishes and she apparently enjoys greater autonomy than other Brontë heroines, M. Paul's power is evident. He leaves her, with considerable satisfaction, in the "good hands" of a landlord he trusts (706), provides her with her first pupils, and, as a final act of graciousness, even condescends to permit her to "remain a Protestant" (713). In his absence Lucy sees herself as "the steward of his property" and determines to "render a good account" (712). It is *his* property, "in a sense *his* version of a suitable world for Lucy ... fastidiously 'neat' and 'small' in every detail" (Nestor (1987), 97). The reader is not posed with the images of confinement that disturbed the conclusion of *Shirley*, but Lucy inhabits, nevertheless, a world which is "very tiny" and "narrow" (700, 701). Although her operation expands Lucy feels she cannot leave "that which M. Paul had chosen, in which he had left, and where he expected again to find [her]" (712). "In the end her whole identity is transformed by him" (Ewbank, 202):

Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart - I preferred him before all humanity. (710)⁸

Reflecting Reader in *Villette*" provides an interesting example of reader-response criticism, and may be found in *New Casebooks: Villette*, edited by Pauline Nestor (83 - 106).

⁸ We may note, of course, that Lucy places value *first* on intellect and then on goodness. Anne Brontë's heroines would reverse these priorities.

Helen Moglen suggests that "it is only in his absence that [Lucy] can and does discover the possibilities of her own strength" (Nestor (1992), 25). I would add that without M. Paul's inspiration it is quite possible Lucy would not have been in a position to alter her circumstances to the degree that his generosity allows. Moglen's assertion is also flawed in its assessment of Lucy's life prior to the novel's concluding chapter, which obviously also demonstrates Lucy's growing understanding of the "possibilities of her own strength". Nevertheless, the conflicting views represented above are worth consideration if only for the difficulties they raise.

We are faced, once again, with the paradox which *The Professor* and *Shirley* presented. Lucy Snowe, although not as outspoken on the subject as Shirley Keeldar, insists on being able to utilise her God-given powers - "feminine or the contrary" (509) - but, even more strongly, desires to be mastered. She does not want to regard M. Paul as her equal, but "pays tribute" to him as her "king" to whom "to offer homage was both a joy and duty" (704). She "worships intellect"⁹ (a rare quality in the novel, it seems, as Ginevra Fanshawe accurately points out: "Nobody in the world but [Lucy] cares for cleverness" (203)) and therefore idolises the professor:

M. Emanuel was not a man to write books; but I have heard him lavish, with careless, unconscious prodigality, such mental wealth as books seldom boast; his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss. Intellectually imperfect as I was, I could read little ... but his tomes of thought were collyrium to the spirit's eyes; over their contents, inward sight grew clear and strong. I used to think what a delight it would be for one who loved him better than he loved himself, to gather and store up those handfuls of gold-dust, so recklessly flung to heaven's reckless winds. (551)

Lucy's quest for "gold-dust" occupies much of the novel and it can be argued that the master-pupil relationship in *Villette* is less significant in itself than it is as a means by which Lucy can gain the education she has been deprived of previously. Craik comments:

The end of the story hardly matters ... whether Lucy marries Paul Emanuel or loses him, the wisdom she has gained and the experience she has undergone cannot be taken from her. (164-5)

⁹ One might compare Charlotte Brontë's heroines with Charles Kingsley's Argemone, who "worshipped intellect" until it became "her tyrant". "She was ready to give up every belief she once had prized, to flutter like a moth around its fascinating brilliance" (*Yeast*, 99).

The same "welcome submission within the conventional marriage relationship" occurs in this novel as in *The Professor* and *Shirley* but creates a less "serious rupture" (Stubbs, 29) because of the book's unrelenting focus upon the heroine's personal growth and journey towards independence. Unlike the other two novels, the courtship in *Villette* is narrated from the pupil's point of view and the female protagonist is thus allowed greater power. In the end Lucy's relationship with her master is not of primary significance and the author leaves us in considerable doubt about the fate of the hero.

In light of my comments above, it may be felt that *Villette* demonstrates a significant departure from Charlotte's earlier position regarding master-pupil roles. However, I do not believe that it is possible to chart any *systematic* development in Brontë's treatment of fictional relationships between teachers and pupil between 1846 and 1853. It is clear from the brief overview of *The Professor*, *Shirley*, and *Villette* given above that Charlotte's views are complex and at times self-contradictory, and that widely divergent (even opposing) readings of the texts are possible as a consequence. No legitimate case can be made which ultimately resolves, and thereby diminishes, issues which remained problematical for the author herself. As Helen Moglen observes, Charlotte was unable "to reconcile the heroine's independent self-realisation with her need to be submerged in the powerful, masculine 'other'" as it was impossible for her to "accommodate these two commanding impulses which psychosexual conditioning and social reality place in extreme conflict" (Nestor (1992), 25). Inga-Stina Ewbank, too, draws attention to the "painfully paradoxical impulses" evident in Charlotte's novels: "intellectual ambition and emotional hunger, drive towards independence and need for love" (202). The fact that in Charlotte Brontë's work these conflicting impulses are evident both in women's relation to men and in female students' relation to male teachers only intensifies her difficulties, as we have seen. Before reflecting on *Jane Eyre*, in which master-pupil roles do not, ostensibly, provide the framework for the protagonists' relationship, it is worth summarising some of the factors that clearly affect our understanding of the novels. I would like to raise three issues of particular significance.

First, it is important to understand Charlotte Brontë as an early-Victorian woman who desired to question, but also to conform to, convention.¹⁰ It is impossible to isolate her from the society whose values she imbibed or the Christian doctrines with which she was so familiar, no matter how unorthodox her interpretation of these values or doctrines were. Beside the desire to conform to the contemporary "ideal of womanhood", which is evident in her own letters as well as in her heroines' concern with feminine or unfeminine behaviour, one can detect the Christian conservatism of her background working itself out, most importantly, in her "sense of fatalism in the workings of human destiny" (Bailin, 51), the deep-rooted conviction that suffering has worth, and her apparent acceptance of Pauline principles applied to marriage. What Jacqueline Banerjee identifies as "masochism in the willing self-abasement of these heroines" (40) may, alternatively, be perceived as willing submission to one's husband "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22) or Christian service or self-sacrifice. Shirley Keeldar's desire to marry a man she feels she can obey is easily attributable to the orthodoxy of the author's spiritual roots. For Charlotte, obedience was often described as a "free choice"¹¹ and she was critical of those, like Harriet Taylor Mill, she perceived as being unaware of "self-sacrificing love and distinterested devotion".¹²

Similarly, seemingly "feminist" aspirations for education, worthwhile employment, or spiritual or emotional liberty may be seen as expressions of women's desire to use their God-given talents fully, as Jesus commanded (Matthew 25). Indeed, several of Charlotte's heroines resist the restrictive suggestions of men in specifically religious terms, insisting they be allowed to use the faculties "of His bestowal" (*Villette*, 329). In *Shirley* Rose Yorke's rebellion against domestic confinement also draws from the Biblical parable of the talents:

If my Master has given me ten talents my duty is to trade with them,
and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers
shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it in a broken-spouted tea-

¹⁰ See chapter two for evidence of Charlotte's conservatism.

¹¹ "Obedience was my heart's free choice/Whate'er his word severe", from Brontë's poem of January 1845 (Barker, 445).

¹² Charlotte's criticism of the writer of "The Enfranchisement of Women" as recorded in a letter, 20 September 1851 (Gaskell, 405).

pot, and shut it up in a china-closet among tea-things. I will *not* commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will *not* prison it in the linen-press to find shrouds among the sheets.
(452)

Christian arguments, of course, were central to "the Woman Question"¹³ being debated at the time and these characters are espousing progressive, but contemporary, opinions. As we shall see in chapter six, Anne Brontë also incorporates Biblical ideas into her fiction, often for similar reasons.

Secondly, it is worth noting that the early-Victorian understanding of what constitutes independence was perhaps different from our own. Margaret Lenta, in an interesting article entitled "Jane Fairfax and Jane Eyre: Educating Women", comments on Mr Knightley's reaction to the marriage of Emma's governess at the commencement of Austen's novel. Miss Taylor has remained at Hartfield four years after Emma's formal education is completed and is valued as a permanent member of the family, yet by marrying a man whose property is only a third as large as the Woodhouses' places herself in a position of reduced material comfort. Emma's father's egocentric perspective does not allow that Miss Taylor's change of circumstance is desirable, but with greater insight Mr Knightley immediately comments on the central issue: "I have great regard for you and Emma; but when it comes to the question of dependence or independence!" (*Emma*, 41). Lenta observes:

Mr Knightley's description of employment as a governess as "dependence" and marriage as "independence" is most interesting as a key to nineteenth-century attitudes in that it reverses the twentieth-century's assessment of the positions available to women. Paid employment ... has long been held to constitute independence for women. ... The striking point about *Emma* is ... that everyone who speaks of employed women sees them as pitiable, perhaps degraded.
(32-3)

We have already seen that the situation of governesses was particularly problematical at this time but Lenta's perspective may be helpful when one considers critics like Kate Millett, Patricia Spacks or Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, who regard the marriages of Charlotte Brontë's heroines as capitulation to convention which constitutes a serious loss of independence for the women concerned. Certainly "the idea of the high statused, professional woman teacher is

¹³ Refer to Joan Burstyn's *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (103).

close at hand" (Lenta, 40) in the Brontës' novels, but at the time they were writing marriage still allowed greater economic stability as well as providing the only legitimate outlet for women's sexuality (as we see in *Jane Eyre*). It is Charlotte's representation of the ideal marital relationship - "based upon the cruel opposition between domination and submission" (Bailin, 77) - which is disturbing, rather than the institution of marriage itself.

A third perspective worthy of consideration, despite the fact that I have treated it dismissively in the previous paragraph, is that represented in its most extreme form by Kate Millett. In her comments on sexual politics in *Villette* Millett emphasises the issues of power which I have argued are central to master-pupil relationships in Charlotte's work. Her arguments are questionable and her expression emotive but it is worth including a lengthy extract due to its direct relevance to education in Brontë's novels. Millett suggests that *Villette* "reads like one long meditation on a prison break" and that Lucy seizes the education her teacher offers in order to evade her "jailer", M. Paul himself:

She plays tame, learns all he has to teach her of the secrets of the establishment - its mathematics and Latin and self-confidence. She plays pupil to a man who hates and fears intelligent women and boasts of having caused the only woman teacher whose learning ever challenged his own to lose her job. Lucy endures the baiting about the 'natural inferiority of females' with which Paul tortures her all through the lesson, and understands that only the outer surface of his bigotry melts when she proves a good student and thereby flatters his pedagogic vanity. Yet in his simplicity he has been hoodwinked into giving her the keys. The moment they are in her hand, and she has beguiled him into lending her money, renting her a school of her own, and facilitated her daring in slipping from the claws of Madame Beck - she's gone. (Nestor (1992), 39)

Writing 16 years after Millett, in 1987, Pauline Nestor's analysis is less emotive and more convincing but essentially presents a similar argument:

The teacher/pupil relationship while mirroring other inequalities of power actually carries within it the potential for equality. Of its nature it ensures that the teacher shares knowledge, the dispossessed becomes the possessed and, as happens with both Frances and Lucy, the pupil can become the teacher. (35-36)

Both writers draw attention to the empowering quality of education and attempt to justify the heroine's "submission" in her relationship with her master as a means to an end. Charlotte Brontë would undoubtedly have regarded this interpretation as a distortion of the "truth" of her

fiction, for reasons which shall become apparent in the next chapter. Nevertheless, this perception of master-pupil relationships in the novels colours modern readers' understanding of the function of education in the Brontës' work and must be acknowledged for this reason.

Before concluding I would like to consider, briefly, the relationships between Jane Eyre and Edward Rochester, Caroline Helstone and Robert Moore, and also some relationships of significance in Anne Brontë's novels. By examining those in Charlotte's work that do *not* capitalise upon the professional association between teachers and pupils we may assess how significantly the educational context affects the relationships we have already examined. We will also see that the author's preoccupation with masterful men is not restricted to the classroom environment. A glance at Anne's portrayal of relationships, while not directly related to education, provides a helpful contrast with her sister's work and effectively introduces some of the issues which will be explored in chapter six.

Despite some critics' disinclination to approve "popular" fiction, *Jane Eyre* remains one of the most satisfying books in English literature. One of the reasons for its enduring popularity is undoubtedly that most readers are left with the conviction that Rochester and Jane's relationship is, in some sense, "right". Despite the twenty year age gap between them, Rochester's dissolute past, dalliance with Blanche Ingram, attempted bigamy, attempts to treat Jane like his "English Celine Varens" (340), and his physical handicaps, Jane repeatedly asserts that their marriage is based upon their true affinity or "likeness" (319) and depth of love for each other. The fact that her story is told with such conviction after ten years of marriage gives weight to her claims (and pre-empts the cynic's objections):

I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest - blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. ... All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character - perfect concord is the result. (576)

Unlike Charlotte's other novels, where interactions between the sexes are rare outside the schoolroom and courtships consequently occur within a classroom context, in *Jane Eyre* we are

given insight into a far more complex relationship based on diverse shared experiences both before and after marriage. One has proportionally more confidence in the "perfect concord" Jane describes than in Crimsworth's summary of his circumstances in the final chapter of *The Professor*.

"Mr Rochester teaches Jane Eyre nothing at all, except the inadvisability of accepting a proposal from a man who immediately adds, 'God pardon me.'" (Beer, 100) Nevertheless, significant aspects of the master-pupil relationship we have already examined remain in evidence. The issue of power is examined in this novel as it is in the others. Mr Rochester is, after all, still Jane's "master" - although in another sense of the word - and, like Edward Crimsworth, Louis Moore and Paul Emanuel, he exploits his position of authority when it suits him.¹⁴ In turn, Jane reverences and delights in her master's "original ... vigorous ... expanded mind" (317) and, like Charlotte's other heroines, places the man she loves on a pedestal. Jane confesses to the reader that in the month following their engagement she idolises Mr Rochester (346) but in her acerbic conversations with her fiancé this is not apparent. She resists his attempts to idealise her and realistically assesses their future together:

Mr Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me - for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate. (327)

He is "mastered", "influenced" and "conquered" (328) despite his position of social superiority; at several points in the novel, including the end, he is physically dependent on Jane; her inheritance allows her economic independence in keeping with her independent will; her moral superiority is continually emphasised; ultimately their marriage occurs without respect for "custom" or "conventionalities" (318) or concern about societal opinion or intrusion. The balance of power oscillates but the outcome is a degree of equality which is not apparent in the master-pupil relationships of the novels, including that between Jane and St

¹⁴ We observed in chapter three that Mr Rochester's pronouncements on Jane's artistic and musical abilities are delivered with unquestioned authority, for example.

John Rivers.¹⁵ One need only compare the proposals already examined in this chapter with Mr Rochester's declaration of love:

"My bride is here," he said, again drawing me to him, "because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?" (319)

Although his proposal is preceded by what appears to be an unnecessarily cruel discussion about his intention to marry Blanche Ingram, it is more convincing than those which are phrased as if the anticipated marriage is purely a matter of academic interest. It is also true that Rochester's efforts to inspire Jane's jealousy create the effect he desires, just as his harsh and aggressive manner allows her to overstep the normal boundaries of propriety. As Pauline Nestor notes, his "repressiveness proves liberating":

In a paradoxical way ... the male abruptness and bullying represents a breach of decorum and convention which enables a corresponding freedom of expression in return. ((1987),36)

Nestor makes this observation of *all* Brontë's masterly men, but in *Jane Eyre* this freedom is particularly evident. Much more could be written about Rochester and Jane, and interesting comparisons drawn between Rochester and St John Rivers or Jane and Blanche Ingram, but my intention here is only to present a few brief observations which illuminate the role of education in the novels' other relationships. For this reason we must now return to *Shirley* and examine the relationship between Caroline Helstone and Robert Moore.

Caroline Helstone is Charlotte Brontë's most conventional heroine, although, as we have already seen, she is granted some progressive and rebellious speeches about the role of women. She is outspoken about the difficulties faced by "old maids" but elsewhere muses on the poor examples of marriage she has been exposed to:

"I wonder we don't all make up our minds to remain single," said Caroline: "we should if we listened to the wisdom of experience." (242)

Very early in the novel, however, it is clear that Caroline will marry Robert Moore. Unlike any of the other relationships we have explored, here there is no marked discrepancy in age or difference in social rank (they are cousins) and, most importantly, Robert Moore is not

¹⁵ The relationship between St John and Jane is examined in my previous chapter.

Caroline's "master". She willingly submits to him because she loves him and is naturally pliant; she is also easily influenced by Shirley and obedient to her uncle. More surprisingly, Robert offers to obey Caroline, too, (692) because he is keenly conscious of his unworthiness in approaching her after proposing to her friend from mercenary motives. He evidently intends to be head of his house but Caroline offers to "take faithful care of [him]" (734). Their marriage conforms to convention, and because they have compatible expectations, seems likely to succeed.

As we observed in chapter four, education does play a part in this conventional courtship, nevertheless. Caroline seeks Robert's assistance with her studies, repaying his help "by an admiring and grateful smile, rather shed at his feet than lifted to his face" (88-9). Robert expresses the wish that he might share his brother's occupation and so "stay at home" to teach Caroline (83) and, later in the novel, speaks to Mr Yorke about his ideal wife in terms which may seem very familiar:

Supposing, Yorke, she had been educated ... supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information, which she took an artless delight in receiving from your lips, and having measured out to her by your hand. (614)

Robert, like Brontë's "masters", perceives marriage as a lifelong opportunity to share his superior education with someone who will appreciate it. Caroline is appreciative but also educates her cousin, introducing him to *Coriolanus* as a "lesson both in languages and ethics, with a touch on politics" (106). One cannot picture Frances or Lucy exerting this much influence over Crimsworth or Paul Emanuel and it is difficult to imagine constructive interactions of any sort between Shirley and Louis after their marriage is established upon the artificial inversion of power we examined earlier. It would seem, therefore, that it is not only discrepancies in levels of education between women and men which underpin Charlotte Brontë's perception of relationships but a "compulsion to place her heroines in some kind of willing subjection to a dominant male" as Barbara Prentis suggests (94).

It has been observed that Anne Brontë's heroines do not seek masters, but partners.¹⁶ In fact, as I will demonstrate in more detail in chapter six, interpersonal relationships are not this author's central concern. Both Agnes Grey and Helen Graham wish, primarily, to do what is morally correct, and see marriage as a means by which they may more effectively serve God. Mr Weston appears in Agnes's world when it is "made up of Bloomfields, Murrays, Hatfields, Ashbys, etc" and "human excellence" seems "a mere dream of the imagination" (103). She is on the verge of despair because the influence of her "habitual associates" (102) is taking its toll:

Already, I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting; and I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last, beneath the baneful influence of such a mode of life. The gross vapours of earth were gathering around me, and closing in upon my inward heaven; and thus it was that Mr. Weston rose at length upon me, appearing like the morning-star in my horizon, to save me from the fear of utter darkness; and I rejoiced that I had now a subject for contemplation, that was above me, not beneath. (103)

While one may hear echoes of the idolatry Charlotte's heroines confess, Anne's focus is quite different. Agnes Grey sees Mr Weston as "the morning-star in [her] horizon" because he is *good*, not because he is her master. At a point of hopelessness he offers spiritual encouragement which enables her to persevere, and his contact with her is empowering, not repressive. Their marriage is described as a shared spiritual journey in which both partners "endeavour to live to the glory of [God]" (208).

In chapter two we considered the relationship between Helen Graham and Arthur Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. As we saw, Helen marries because she hopes to exert a positive moral influence over the man she loves and although her choice is misguided and her influence is rejected her intentions are clearly very different from any of Charlotte's heroines. Huntingdon is "masterful" but this repels rather than attracts Helen. She eventually leaves her husband because he abuses his position of power in their marriage and attempts to corrupt their young son, and Anne Brontë approves this action because the spiritual welfare of another

¹⁶ Elizabeth Langland expresses this view as she compares Anne and Charlotte's attitudes to masculine aggression in *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (56-8). Her views are not central to my argument here but are, nevertheless, worth considering.

person is at stake. Her focus is unvaryingly moral. Charlotte and Anne's priorities are clearly very different and their emphases are reflected in the relationships of their protagonists, as we have seen. In the next chapter we will consider the ways in which their values affect their treatment of educational issues within their work.

CHAPTER SIX

*"We arrive at the truth, not by the reason only,
but also by the heart."
(Pascal)*

The past two chapters have focused most closely on Charlotte's novels, at the expense of Anne's work, because their central concern has been to examine the ways in which education contributes to heterosexual relationships in the Brontës' fiction. For Charlotte, this function of fictional educational interactions is extremely significant, as I have demonstrated, but in Anne's work other issues are of greater importance. In chapter two we observed that Anne and Charlotte do share some common concerns about educational issues but their differences are more striking than their similarities. It should be evident that each author's attitudes towards education, and treatment of the subject within her fiction, allows insight into her wider purposes in writing, and this concluding chapter explores the reasons behind the sisters' differing approaches to the same subject. Its aim is to demonstrate that the Brontës' treatment of education within their novels illuminates their attitudes towards writing itself. Conversely, it may be observed that the authors' comments on their own work grant us some understanding of their treatment of educational issues. This reciprocal relationship provides the foundation for the argument that follows.

There are several important philosophical issues which contribute to Anne and Charlotte's differences. The first, as I suggested in chapter two, is that the sisters hold contrasting views about what constitutes "truth". This chapter discusses the role of naturalism in the novels before turning to Charlotte's more complex understanding of "realism". Next, it explores the recurring conflict between emotion and reason, which is most evident in Charlotte's work, and considers the implications of the perceived incompatibility of the two for education, and particularly for the education of women. The chapter then investigates the way in which Anne Brontë's Christian values influence her portrayal of education, and compares her religious world-view with her sister's insistent emphasis on "the primacy of feeling" (Spacks, 58).

What is truth? For the purpose of this discussion (and to sidestep lengthy philosophical debate) we will begin by accepting these Oxford English Dictionary definitions:

- + Conformity with fact; agreement with reality
- + Accuracy of delineation or representation; the quality of being true to life
- + The fact or facts; the actual state of the case; the matter or circumstance as it really is

In these terms, truth in fiction may be equated with verisimilitude, and it is this understanding which Anne Brontë promotes in the preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In it she defends *Agnes Grey* against accusations of "extravagant over-colouring", insisting that events "were carefully copied from the life, with a most scrupulous avoidance of all exaggeration", and upholds her second novel as a depiction of people and circumstances "as they really are" (xxxviii). Anne's defence is so vehement that one must consider her insistence on the honesty of her work, fictional though it is, as part of her emphasis on personal integrity. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that her portrayal of education is naturalistic, or that she has been both praised and censured for the "factuality" of her fiction.

"'Truth' of representation was always Anne's goal" (Langland, 36). She "documents constantly and accurately with concrete, vivid and economical detail" so that her writing has "the conviction of the documentary" (Craik, 235, 213). Thus her descriptions of education in *Agnes Grey* include many specific examples of the "disorderly conduct" (42) of the pupils, and pinpoint many trials of the governess's position, as well as making direct comments on curricula (64), although much more could clearly have been said on these subjects. The narrator comments:

I have not enumerated half the vexatious propensities of my pupils, or half the troubles resulting from my heavy responsibilities, for fear of trespassing too much upon the reader's patience ... but if a parent has therefrom gathered any useful hint, or an unfortunate governess received thereby the slightest benefit, I am well rewarded for my pains.
(36-7)

Anne Brontë deliberately chooses to select and record details which will convey "the actual state of the case" in order that the reader may educate him or herself. As Elizabeth Langland observes:

She has the power to shape and revise a reader's expectations and values by explicit appeals to his or her sensibility and intelligence. In short, she is capable of creating, through the medium of fiction, a reader fit to read her story. (58)

Charlotte's response to this aspect of her sister's style is enlightening, as we shall see shortly. At this stage it is most important to note Anne's "unswerving commitment to the representation of 'truth'" (Langland, 98) that arises from her belief that "truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it".

One can also isolate naturalistic elements in Charlotte Brontë's work, especially in her detailed accounts of teaching experiences and Belgian educational practices. The publication of Charlotte's novels coincided with efforts to establish national schools in England and in this educational climate, as R.A Colby notes, there was a great deal of interest in overseas' teaching practices. Commenting on *Villette* he writes:

Some chapters ... are so packed with detail about school administration and classroom procedure that they read like source material for Matthew Arnold's *Popular Education in France* and *Schools and Universities on the Continent*. (Allott, 229)

Similarly, Harriet Björk claims that the reader of *Villette* "will think of the state of schools in England and on the Continent, as if he were reading a newspaper report" (112). In fact, those who comment on the "unusual sense of actuality" (Colby, in Allott, 235) in Charlotte's fiction often do so on the basis of her portrayal of education.

Jane Eyre has been applauded for its "truth". In 1873 Charlotte's publisher, George Smith, insisted that within this novel Charlotte chose "to adhere to stern reality". Writing from his personal knowledge of the author he asserted; "The keen observation of the writer is manifest on every page. Intense realism is its chief characteristic" (Allott, 142). Obviously Brontë's representation of Lowood school was sufficiently "like life" for the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge to be recognised, although Charlotte was clearly surprised when it was.¹ Some of *Jane Eyre*'s experiences as Mr Rochester's employee also appear to be credible, if one may accept the words of a governess writing for *Household Words* in 1856:

¹ See chapter one, footnote four.

Her governess experience, up to her flight from Thornfield, is true. I have known parallel cases, in which, with temptation not less than hers, girls have fought their battles as bravely, as painfully, and as successfully; but, with the final romantic result, no! (August 23, 1856, 138)

This writer's conclusion is both perceptive and significant, as we shall shortly discover. Views of *Jane Eyre* as primarily "true to life" are rare, however, and the novel has been criticised for its gothic elements, plot weaknesses and improbability. Lord David Cecil, writing in 1934, dismissed Charlotte Brontë as one whose "imagination did not know the meaning of restraint ... She stretches the long arm of coincidence till it becomes positively dislocated" (116, 117). Later critics, such as M.H Scargill, have attempted to demonstrate that in this novel "Charlotte had broken completely with naturalistic tradition" (Allott, 34). In his article "Poetic Symbolism in *Jane Eyre*" Scargill distinguishes between "factual truth and poetic truth", commenting on the expression of personal experience which is "not necessarily factual, but is none the less real" (Allott, 176). This distinction is one to which we will return. It is certainly worth noting that even when characters are supposedly based on real people - for example, Charlotte claimed that Helen Burns was a portrait of her own sister, Maria Brontë - these were not necessarily readily recognised. Modern readers may feel that such a saintly character could not possibly be "life-like" despite the author's protestations.

Shirley declares itself to be "something real and solid ... unromantic as Monday morning", founded upon facts communicated to the reader without "sentiment ... poetry ... reverie ... and melodrama" (7). The difficulties of Charlotte's personal circumstances at the time of writing are reflected in the disunities and contradictions of the novel, suggesting that her original intentions for the work were not completely realised, but one may identify some of the novel's connections with "real life" without disregarding the elements which seem anything but realistic.² As we observed in chapter two, the novel is based on Charlotte's research of the Luddite riots, and several characters draw their existence from the author's observations of people she had met. She warmly defended her representation of the curates, and was justified

² It is interesting that one of the incidents which seems most implausible, Shirley's secretly cauterising her own dog-bite wound, was in fact based on an action performed by Emily Brontë.

in doing so when clergymen (such as Mr Helstone's original, Hammond Roberson) were recognised by some readers. Charlotte also claimed that Shirley Keeldar was "a portrayal of Emily as she might have been had she been placed in health and prosperity" (Barker, 612). However, Juliet Barker observes that this portrait is so romanticised that "even Ellen Nussey did not recognize the supposed original of Shirley, despite her familiarity with Emily's outward traits" (612). Charlotte may have felt her description was "photographed from the life" (Ewbank, 162) but it seems the end-product was over-exposed.

In its comments on education *Shirley* demonstrates more conformity with fact. Mrs Pryor's uncharacteristically lengthy and heated remarks on the condition of governesses stem from Charlotte's personal experiences, as we observed in chapters two and three, but also enabled the author to respond to a negative review of *Jane Eyre* printed in the *Quarterly Review* of December 1848. Presenting the reviewer's callous dismissiveness of governesses as the opinions of Mrs Pryor's former employer, "Mrs Hardman", by quoting verbatim from the *Quarterly*, Charlotte effectively ensured a sympathetic response from her readership. She adhered strictly to the "truth" in that the views the fictional employer expressed were commonly held in the 1840's and 50's. *Shirley* also provides us with a glimpse of the limited education provided by the local parishes. In the novel three Anglican schools cater for "twelve hundred scholars" (328) due to the voluntary efforts expected of local ladies, including the Rector's niece. No comment is made about the education the students receive but the air of a bustling, somewhat haphazard and inefficient school system is conveyed.

The Professor and *Villette*, as we have already seen, include a number of accounts of real educational circumstances. Many chapters are dedicated to detailed descriptions of the schools run by M. Pelet, Mdlle. Reuter, and Madame Beck. In these novels "school doings ... take place in Belgium and were consequently puzzling to the original readers [so that] the author explains them" (McMurty, 205). Brontë comments on assessment methods, teacher-pupil ratios, disciplinary practices, daily and yearly routines, boarding accommodation and classroom surroundings, students' clothing and diets, and common recreational activities,

concluding, in *Villette*, that the "foreign school" provides "a complete and most charming contrast to many English institutions of the same kind" (103). One can construct a detailed picture of Continental education from these novels. Some readers may even feel that Charlotte has "sacrificed too much to down-to-earth truthfulness" (Tillotson, in Allott, 183). Despite the detail that is included, however, Wendy Craik believes that Charlotte's accounts "could never be documentary evidence of life in a Brussels pensionnat" (169):

There are many violations of what we know to be either actual or possible. Though we can visualize the schoolrooms, the garden and the long dormitory, what happens in them could not happen in a real school of the 1850's. Lucy has all sorts of intimate conversations with Paul Emanuel, apparently in full view and earshot of a class of sharp-eared, inquisitive, adolescent girls ... The material is often autobiographical, yet no school on earth could run like this one. (168)

Certainly the alacrity and speed with which Brontë's teachers leave their classrooms, at the sound of a bell or on any other pretext, contributes to one's scepticism about the effectiveness of the institutions in which they teach. It also seems most unlikely that a "directress" who chose to rule by stealth or espionage, as so many of the employers in Charlotte's work do, would be able to command the respect of her staff. I have already commented on the extraordinary disciplinary practices exercised by teachers in the novels and the fluidity of the syllabus being communicated to students. While these may have reflected Charlotte's own experiences of teaching I would agree that "naturalism seems not to be her main intention" (Craik, 168). Charlotte may have claimed that "the first duty of an author is ... a faithful allegiance to Truth and Nature" but in her writing she inclined to the second duty - "such a conscientious study of Art as shall enable [the author] to *interpret* eloquently and effectively the oracles delivered by those two great deities".³

Margaret Mary Berg observes that the Brontës' notions of truthfulness are clarified by their heroines' attitudes to art. In "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Anne Brontë's Jane Eyre*" Berg compares Helen Huntingdon's "faithful representations of external nature" with Jane Eyre's "imaginative self-expression" (14). She argues that Charlotte's dismissal of her sister's second novel, in the "Biographical Notice" written after Anne's death, acts as "an assertion in a tacit

³ Charlotte's views as expressed in a letter quoted by Pauline Nestor, 25. (Italics mine.)

critical exchange between the two sisters concerning the proper function of art" (10) and has influenced critical debate (to Anne's detriment) ever since its publication:

The comments seem calculated to lessen Anne Brontë's reputation: by insisting on her sister's "morbid" investment in reproducing "every detail" of situations which had caused her pain, Charlotte Brontë effectively reduces the novel from a deliberately designed work of fiction to an obsessive reiteration of personal concerns. (10)

However, Charlotte was as adamant about the truth of her fiction as Anne. On April 2 1849 she wrote to William Smith Williams:

Unless I can look beyond the greatest Masters, and study Nature herself, I have no right to paint. Unless I can have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent. (Ewbank, 161)

By her own admission, she clung to her pseudonym chiefly due to "the fear that if she relinquished it, strength and courage would leave her, and she should ever after shrink - from writing the plain truth" (Barker, 615). She resisted criticism, "so possessed was she with the feeling that she had described reality" (Gaskell, 215). Yet, despite the factual and naturalistic elements that are evident in the novels it is obvious that Charlotte's understanding of "plain truth" is not the same as her sister's.

For Anne, as we have seen, truth is external and objective. For Charlotte, truth is internal and subjective. Her concern is not to record facts objectively or with accuracy of delineation but to transform "the 'reality' of experience ... into the 'truth' of imaginative experience" (Ewbank, 163). Consequently Charlotte may claim that Rochester and Jane's telepathic communication at the end of *Jane Eyre* is not a far-fetched and awkward plot device but something "true". She is justified in doing so because "the actual was only too real to her, but the ideal was more real" (Bonnell, 51). She would undoubtedly have concurred with Henry James in his understanding that:

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. (Dietrich, 8)

David Cecil observes: "Her range is confined, not only to a direct expression of an individual's emotions and impressions, but to a direct expression of Charlotte Brontë's emotions and impressions" (Allott, 168) and, of course, many other critics commend Brontë's work as being

particularly powerful as a consequence. As Inga-Stina Ewbank expresses it, Charlotte Brontë understands truth in fiction as "reality recreated by the imagination" (165). One could add that Charlotte's view of truth is also reality recreated by the *emotions*. Her novels "are not exercises of the mind, but cries of the heart" (Cecil, in Allott, 167); she may be described as "a realist of the feelings" (Cross, in Allott, 181) whose focus is "the inner life, the private passions" (Cecil, 110) and this, as we shall see, has significant implications for her representation of education. She values intellect but prizes emotion more highly.

On September 20, 1851, Charlotte Brontë wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell:

You are right when you say that there is a large margin in human nature over which the logicians have no dominion; glad am I that it is so.
(Gaskell, 405)

Not surprisingly, the characters in her novels espouse similar views and measure others' worth by their capacity to feel with intensity. This is partly because her protagonists make moral judgments on the basis of what they feel to be right. Hoping to correct Robert Moore's faults of pride and arrogance, and in order to help him to empathise with his employees, his cousin asks him to read *Coriolanus*. The intention of the exercise is that he may "discover by the feelings the reading will give [him] at once how high and low [he is]" (*Shirley*, 102). Robert may analyse the play and thereby draw valid conclusions but Caroline insists that he must read to be given "new sensations" and "to feel [his] life more strongly" (101). When he has finished she demands whether he has "felt Shakespeare" (104) because she clearly believes, as the author does, that intellectual understanding alone is insufficient to influence a person's attitudes and behaviour. In this respect, as we shall see, Charlotte's perspective is very different from Anne's.

However, Charlotte Brontë values the "large margin in human nature over which the logicians have no dominion" primarily because she believes a person's capacity to feel with intensity (even if their emotions are released in ways which are apparently destructive) provides some indication of their ability to love. Consequently, in *Villette*, despite Lucy's infatuation, John Bretton is found lacking:

Dr. John *could* think, and think well, but he was rather a man of action than of thought; he *could* feel, and feel vividly in his way, but his heart had no chord for enthusiasm: to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, embuing summer clouds; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. (372)

Inevitably Lucy chooses a "wicked venomous man" (492) who, in his "malevolent moods" (217) often appears to have "no control over his passions" (505). The contrast with Dr. John is obvious. Similar contrasts are drawn between St. John Rivers and Edward Rochester, and Robert and Louis Moore, and underlined at the points of their respective proposals to Jane and Shirley. In each case Charlotte's heroines value love - "the intense attachment which would make [them] willing to die" for their husbands³ - more highly than other pragmatic considerations. Dr. John, St. John and Robert all hold respected positions in society, are emotionally stable and strikingly handsome in appearance, but each is rejected in favour of a volatile master who can recognise the "passionate ardour" (*Villette*, 216) of his bride-to-be. In the novels the "vehemence of emotion" repeatedly "claims mastery" and "asserts a right to reign at last; yes, - and to speak" (*Jane Eyre*, 317). Even Charlotte's most conventional heroine, Caroline Helstone, is granted one such emotional outburst (but is excused on the grounds that no men are present):

Of course I should often be influenced by my feelings. They were given me to that end. Whom my feelings teach me to love I *must* and *shall* love. (*Shirley*, 455)

She expresses the views of Jane, Lucy and even Frances. As Patricia Spacks observes:

The admirable woman, in [Charlotte's] novels, will think correctly and claim to be guided by reflection; but she believes in the primacy of feeling and the value of impulse, finally, emotional capacity an index of worth. (58)

David Cecil's assessment of Charlotte's heroines also remains most apt: "They do not analyse anything. They only feel very strongly about everything." (111-2)

Since the original publication of Charlotte's work the novels have been criticised for the "prevalence of one tendency, or one idea, throughout the whole conception and action ...

⁴ Charlotte's measure of how much "a woman ought to love the man her husband". Letter to Ellen Nussey, 12 March 1839 (Barker, 301).

love".⁴ This fixation is not problematical in itself but creates difficulties because of its impact upon other issues raised in Brontë's fiction:

In Charlotte's novels the overwhelming emphasis on the need to love and be loved finally submerges all the other essentially feminist issues - the problems of women's employment, their economic dependence, their restriction to a purely domestic range of activities and ambitions, the isolation of the self-supporting woman. All these problems are resolved, or rather simply disappear, on the marriage of the heroine. (Stubbs, 29)

We have already seen the inseparable connection between education and the issues Patricia Stubbs itemises, and it is surprising that Stubbs does not refer explicitly to women's education in her assessment of Brontë's work. In its uneasy relation to "the primacy of feeling" it is an issue of central importance.

In her novels Charlotte Brontë insistently distinguishes between passion and intellect, feeling and reason, and the two are never fully reconciled. *Villette* draws this distinction most overtly when Lucy Snowe struggles to obey the sober advice of the "hag" Reason at the expense of Imagination and Hope, who urge her to express her feelings for Graham Bretton:

Reason is as vindictive as a devil: for me, she was always envenomed as a stepmother. If I have obeyed her it has chiefly been with the obedience of fear, not of love. Long ago I should have died of her ill-usage: her stint, her chill, her barren board, her icy bed, her savage, ceaseless blows; but for that kinder Power who holds my secret and sworn allegiance. (328)

When Charlotte's heroines uphold Victorian convention and obey "Reason and Conscience" (*Jane Eyre*, 404) their submission is reluctant and their choice is often costly. Their "secret and sworn allegiance" remains with imagination and emotion. As an unnamed reviewer of *Villette* wrote of Charlotte Brontë in 1853, "Her talk is of duty, - her predilections lie with passion" (*Athenæum*, 12 February 1853, in Allott, 87).

While it may not have been Brontë's intention to undermine the value of education (which she promotes elsewhere in her fiction) her emphasis on the value of feeling can have this effect. If irrational qualities are so highly prized the worth of logic and the pursuit of factual knowledge

⁴ Charlotte's measure of how much "a woman ought to love the man her husband", from a letter to Ellen Nussey, 12 March, 1839 (Barker, 301).

is diminished. This recalls one of the central difficulties for women in Victorian society. The fact that women were praised for their "natural morality" and ability to think intuitively may have seemed favourable, but actually served to widen the gap between the sexes. As we observed in chapter one, the idealisation of women led to the understanding that they should be protected from the corrupting influence of "masculine" areas of tuition, and the acceptance of "women's intuition" had its corollary in the fear that logic and reasoning were either impossible or damaging for women. By validating "a different kind of knowing - an intuitive, non-rational knowledge which challenges accepted mores" (Nestor (1987), 65) Charlotte emphasises the worth of "feminine" knowledge. Simultaneously, and undoubtedly unwittingly, she undermines contemporary arguments in favour of women's access to the education available to men. For example, Lucy Snowe admits her ignorance of the knowledge M. Paul ascribes to her, but is proud that she "*sometimes*, not always, feel[s] a knowledge of [her] own" (*Villette*, 514). If the knowledge women already possessed was demonstrably of equivalent value to that held by men, or even superior to it, educational reform need not be advocated. This may seem an extreme interpretation to place on Brontë's work but it helps to account for one's sense that, despite her recognition that all was not well for women in the educational sphere, Charlotte had little real desire to affect change. From her perspective "greatness" for women, and for men too, would be achieved through each individual's ability to feel, not to think.⁶

In Anne Brontë's fiction we are also presented with characters whose values and judgments are determined by their emotions and who place greater emphasis on the worth of feeling than reason. These individuals are, however, shown to be misguided. Succumbing to emotion, rather than exercising good judgment or listening to rational arguments from people who are in a position to advise well, Helen chooses to marry Arthur Huntingdon, and *The Tenant of*

⁶ Many of Charlotte's letters could be cited as further evidence. Her dismissive attitude towards Jane Austen is understandable on these grounds (see Barker, 635) as are many of her comments on the value of marriage. Brontë observed in a letter to Miss Wooler (19 September, 1854) that "if true domestic happiness replace Fame - the exchange will indeed be for the better" (Barker, 762) and this remark is typical. She believed that single women should be occupied profitably but that true fulfilment could only be achieved in marriage.

Wildfell Hall provides a detailed account of the painful consequences of her decision. In this novel, freely following one's own desires, unrestricted by ethical considerations, leads to the disintegration of relationships and the destruction of self, as we see most graphically in Huntingdon's physical demise. In fact, both *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey* "contrast disciplined individuals with those whose passions are indulged and unregulated" (Langland, 37) and there is no doubt where the writer's sympathies lie. By this comparison I am not suggesting that Charlotte intended to encourage the reckless abandonment of conventional morality but I do wish to highlight the different emphases in the sisters' works.

Anne considers that emotion alone is a poor guide to judgment. Instead she endorses "the Austenian balance of reason and passion"⁷ (which Charlotte rejected) and advocates self-control. She insists that people must be taught to exercise both reason and self-restraint from an early age. It is her conviction that through rational processes it is possible to "make Virtue practicable, Instruction desirable, and Religion lovely and comprehensible" (*Agnes Grey*, 12) and this accounts for her commitment to education for both sexes. Elizabeth Langland links Anne Brontë's views with those of Enlightenment feminism of the late eighteenth century "which defined Reason as the supreme guide to conduct" (39), and with ideas expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft in particular, but Langland notes:

It is highly unlikely that Anne Brontë would have read Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ... yet the similarity between what Wollstonecraft argues and what Brontë's novel argues is striking. I attribute the similarity to Brontë's own deep sense of divine ends to which individual lives are to be put. (139)

These women shared values which stemmed from the same source (Langland, 39) and any understanding of Anne Brontë's work must acknowledge the Christian beliefs which underpin her writing. In the previous chapter I commented on the effect of the Brontës' Christian background upon Charlotte's attitudes to marriage and women's rights to profitable occupation,

⁷ Elizabeth Langland uses this description of Helen's comment, "My affections not only *ought* to be founded on approbation, but they will and must be so: for without approving I cannot love. It is needless to say I ought to be able to respect and honour the man I marry as *well* as love him, for I cannot love him without" (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 130).

but Biblical language and ideas pervade Anne's work. There are three tenets which I consider to be of particular significance to Anne's treatment of education.

First, Anne Brontë believes that all people are accountable to God for the use they have made of the abilities that God has given them. In the previous chapter I alluded to the parable of the talents (Matthew 25). Its significance for Anne is evident in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, both in the Preface - where the author justifies her writing by insisting, "Such humble talents as God has given me I will endeavour to put to their greatest use" (xxxix) - and in the text itself. After eight weeks of marriage Helen Huntingdon uses the parable to rebuke her husband, and continues:

Of him, to whom less is given, less will be required; but our utmost exertions are required of us all. You are not without the capacity of veneration, and faith and hope, and every other requisite to a Christian's character, if you choose to employ them; but all our talents increase in the using, and every faculty, both good and bad, strengthens by exercise; therefore, if you choose to use the bad - or those which tend to evil till they become your masters - and neglect the good till they dwindle away, you have only yourself to blame. (206-7)

In this context Anne is not addressing the subject of education but obviously the views expressed here have consequences for the education of men and women alike. If one's "talents increase in the using" and "every faculty strengthens by exercise" a person clearly has a moral responsibility to ensure that they use and exercise every talent they possess. In the Biblical story, the servant who failed to invest his talents wisely is dismissed as "worthless" (Matt. 25:30). For Anne Brontë, therefore, acceptance that women should only be educated in order to play a decorative or domestic role in society, despite their potential and willingness to attempt more challenging tasks, is not only a social problem but a spiritual sin.

In *Cassandra and other selections from Suggestions for Thought*, Florence Nightingale presents similar Christian arguments, suggesting that "the family" provides "too narrow a field for the development of an immortal spirit, be that spirit male or female":

The chances are a thousand to one that, in that small sphere, the task for which that immortal spirit is destined by the qualities and the gifts which its Creator has placed within it, will not be found. (Poovey, 216)

Anne Brontë provides us with examples of women choosing to utilise their gifts outside the family. Agnes Grey finds the prospect of "being driven to straits, and thrown upon [her] own resources ... exhilarating" (7) and although financial necessity does not demand it, she enters the workforce with the intention of exercising her "unused faculties" and trying her "unknown powers" (12). Her mother, later in the novel, refuses her daughters' offers of a home and chooses to manage her own school rather than return to the idleness accepted and encouraged by society. Helen Graham, upon leaving her husband, does not rely on the financial support of her brother, uncle or aunt, but "labour[s] hard to improve [her] talent" (356) so that she may provide for herself and her son. In each instance the author raises alternatives which the women reject in favour of exercising their faculties fully. To do otherwise is to "throw the gifts of God aside as worthless" (Nightingale, in Poovey, 216).

Closely related to this belief is Anne's conviction that temporal actions have eternal consequences, as we see in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In debate with her husband, Helen Huntingdon provides Biblical support for her views by citing Ecclesiastes 11:9:

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that, for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment. (208)

If this is the case, it is the responsibility of educators to teach "the distinction between right and wrong" (*Agnes Grey*, 66) and to encourage their students to exercise self-restraint. Agnes Grey, for example, comments with regret on the "sad want of principle" which Rosalie Murray exhibits because it is evident that her pupil has "*not been taught* to moderate her desires, to control her temper, or bridle her will, or to sacrifice her own pleasure for the good of others" (66, italics mine). The author believes that the central duty of a governess is to be a moral guide for her charges, so details of curricular are included only if they have a bearing on the character of the pupil or his or her spiritual or moral development. In Anne's work most remarks on the pupils' progress, or lack of it, are made in connection with their behaviour rather than their academic achievements because their actions and speech provide the best key to their spiritual condition. Agnes observes, for example, that Maltida Murray is "barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless and irrational":

One proof of the deplorable state of her mind was, that from her father's example she had learned to swear like a trooper ... I tried to impress upon her how wrong it was, and how distressing to the ears of decent people; but all in vain. (69)

Agnes wishes to emphasise that "out of the overflow of the mouth the heart speaks" (Matthew 12:34) because of her desire to uphold Jesus' teaching: "I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:36). Matilda Murray is not influenced but Agnes acts as Brontë's mouthpiece nevertheless.

The third principle which Anne insists upon is that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:17). She distinguishes between academic ability and spiritual wisdom and demonstrates the worthlessness of the former without the latter. Arthur Huntingdon, for example, is "no fool" intellectually (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 45) but is "foolish" in the Biblical sense because he is merely "wise in [his] own eyes" (Proverbs 3:7). In *Agnes Grey* the same distinction is drawn in the narrator's comparison of two clergymen. Mr Hatfield is regarded by Agnes as "one of those who ... 'make the word of God of none effect by their traditions, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men'" (86). His curate, Mr Weston, preaches with "evangelical truth" and "earnest simplicity" (85) thereby winning Agnes's approval.⁸ Agnes recognises the different sources of the teaching being presented by the ministers, and in her own teaching endeavours to avoid relying on her own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). She prays at least twice daily for her pupils, seeking "Divine assistance" to enable her to persevere with them (29).

Every educational interaction depicted by Anne Brontë serves a similar purpose and is part of her "moral passion" (Ewbank, 70). Her intentions are clearly very different from her sister's. Where Charlotte is concerned with a master's ability to control, discipline and establish his authority, Anne's teachers aim to "let [their] light shine before men, that they may see [their] good deeds" and be drawn to God (Matthew 5:16). Charlotte's educators are primarily motivated by their need for money; Anne's by their desire "to benefit the children" (*Agnes*

⁸ Charlotte draws a similar distinction between the religion expressed by Mr Brocklehurst and Miss Temple in *Jane Eyre*.

Grey, 29). Fulfilment is found by Charlotte's teachers in their marriages to pupils; Anne's find theirs in relationship with God. Although Anne's heroines marry, either might have asserted, "If I were alone in the world, I have still my God and my religion" (Helen, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 336). Obviously the Brontë sisters' very different values are reflected in the way education operates in their fiction.

The difficulty for modern readers is that Anne Brontë's adherence to Christian absolutes may appear conservative whereas Charlotte's overt statements about the need for women's role in society to change may seem progressive. In fact, this examination of the role of education in their six published novels has demonstrated that Anne ignores social convention in order to present what she believes to be "right" and, in so doing, challenges the "whole scope and purpose" (Patmore, 532) of education. Charlotte, despite her concern for women in similar situations to her own, is essentially preoccupied with the emotional fulfilment of individuals, not with the reformation of social ills. Education provides for her protagonists a physical and emotional environment in which relationships may be established and developed. Although examples of teaching and learning proliferate in her novels they do not act as a platform for social commentary.

Education was only one issue of significance in Victorian society and it provides only one point of entry into understanding the Brontës' work. An investigation of their treatment of other contemporary social problems, some of which have been referred to in this thesis, may have allowed similar explorations of the sisters' values, artistic intentions, and reactions to the world to which they belonged, but their personal involvement with education and experiential knowledge of the problems faced by educators increases the reader's interest in their treatment of this particular subject. In light of the Brontës' background it seems remarkable that their criticisms of the treatment of governesses, school conditions, and the injustices and inadequacies of curricula are not more fully developed, until one considers the personal vision each sister wished to express. For Anne, writing was an exercise in conveying truth so that a reader could draw his or her own conclusions and apply them. The "priceless treasure"

(*Preface to The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, xxxvii) she wishes to share is spiritual. For Charlotte, the truth of imaginative experience was more absorbing than the circumstances surrounding her characters or herself. She wrote "to give [her] soul its natural release" (*Shirley*, 524). Neither Anne nor Charlotte presented fully developed commentaries on the subject of education, or, indeed, any other social issue, simply because each had another focus which she regarded as more important.

"And now I think I have said sufficient."⁹

⁹ *Agnes Grey*, 208

WORKS CITED

- Allott, Miriam, ed. *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre and Villette - A Casebook*. London: MacMilan Press Ltd. 1973.
- Austen, Jane. *Emma*. 1816. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1966.
- Persuasion*. 1817. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1990.
- Pride and Prejudice*. 1813. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1995.
- Bailin, Miriam. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994.
- Banerjee, Jacqueline. "Girls' Education and the Crisis of the Heroine in Victorian Fiction". *English Studies* 1994, Jan. 75:1: 34-45.
- Barker, Juliet. *The Brontës*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1994.
- Barker, Kenneth, ed. *The NIV Study Bible: The New International Version*. Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers. 1985.
- Beer, Patricia. *Reader, I Married Him*. London: MacMillan Press. 1974.
- Berg, Margaret Mary. "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Anne Brontë's Jane Eyre." *The Victorian Newsletter*. Spring 1987. Number 71. P10-15.
- Björk, Harriet. *The Language of Truth: Charlotte Brontë, the Woman Question and the Novel*. Lund: CWK Gleerup Lund. 1974.
- Bonnell, Henry. *Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Jane Austen: Studies in Their Works*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1902.
- Brontë, Anne. *Agnes Grey*. 1847. Oxford: Clarendon. 1988
- The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. 1848. Oxford: Clarendon. 1992.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Oxford: Clarendon. 1969.
- The Professor*. 1857. Oxford: Clarendon. 1987.

- Shirley*. 1849. Oxford: Clarendon. 1979.
- Villette*. 1853. Oxford: Clarendon. 1984.
- Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. 1847. Oxford: Clarendon. 1976.
- Brown, Julia Prewitt. *A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth Century English Novel*. New York: MacMillan Press. 1948.
- Burstyn, Joan. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. London: Croom Helm. 1980.
- Cecil, David. *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*. London: Constable and Co Ltd. 1934.
- Collins, Philip. *Dickens and Education*. London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd. 1963.
- Craik, W.A. *The Brontë Novels*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1968.
- Dietrich, R.F. *The Art of Fiction*. 1967. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1974.
- Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. 1850. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1982.
- Dombey and Son*. 1848. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1985.
- Little Dorrit*. 1857. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1967.
- Martin Chuzzlewit*. 1843-4. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1968.
- Nicholas Nickleby*. 1839. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1978.
- Our Mutual Friend*. 1864-5. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1971.
- Sketches by Boz*. 1839. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1995.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. London: MacMillan. 1975.

- Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. 1871-2. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1966.
- Ewbank, Inga-Stina *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Novelists*. London: Edward Arnold. 1966.
- Foster, Shirley. *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual*. London: Croom Helm, Ltd. 1985.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. 1874. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1975.
- Gezari, Janet. *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct: The Author and the Body at Risk*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 1992.
- Goreau, Angeline, ed. *Agnes Grey*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1988.
- Ingham, Patricia. *The Language of Gender and Class: Transformation in the Victorian Novel*. London: Routledge. 1996.
- Kane, Penny. *Victorian Families in Fact and Fiction*. New York: St Martin's Press. 1995.
- King, Jeanette. *Jane Eyre*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. 1986.
- Kingsley, Charles. *Yeast*. London: Croom and Co. N.D
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Anne Brontë: The Other One*. London: MacMillan Education Ltd. 1989.
- Lenta, Margaret. "Jane Fairfax and Jane Eyre: Educating Women". *ARIEL* 1981, Oct. 12:4: 27-41.
- Levine, Philippa. *Victorian Feminism 1850 - 1900*. London: Century Hutchinson Ltd. 1987.
- McMurty, Jo. *Victorian Life and Victorian Fiction - A Companion for the American Reader*. Connecticut: Archon Books. 1979.
- MacPherson, Pat. *Reflecting on Jane Eyre*. London: Routledge. 1989.
- Meyer, Susan, ed. *The New Nineteenth Century Feminist*
- Harman, S. Barbara, ed. *Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction*. New York: Garland Publishing. 1996.

- Nestor, Pauline. *Charlotte Brontë*. Houndmills: Macmillan Education Ltd. 1987.
- Nestor, Pauline, ed. *New Casebooks Villette - Contemporary Critical Essays*. New York: St Martins Press. 1992.
- Patmore, Coventry. "The Social Position of Women". *North British Review*, 14, 1851: 515-540.
- Poole, Russell. "Cultural Reformation and Cultural Reproduction in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* v33. Autumn 1993: 859-73.
- Poovey, Mary, ed. *Cassandra and Other Suggestions for Thought*. London: Pickering and Chatlo. 1991.
- Prentis, Barbara. *The Brontë Sisters and George Eliot: A Unity of Difference*. Great Britain: The MacMillan Press, Ltd. 1988.
- Rossi, Alice S, ed. *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill: Essays on Sex Equality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1970.
- Rowbotham, Judith. *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1989.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *The Female Imagination*. Toronto: Random House. 1972.
- Spark, Muriel. *The Essence of the Brontës*. London: Peter Owen. 1993.
- Stubbs, Patricia. *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1180-1920*. Sussex: The Harvester Press. 1979.
- Thomson, Patricia. *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837 - 1873*. 1956. Connecticut: Greenwood Press. 1978.
- Winnifrith, Tom. *The Brontës and their Background: Romance and Reality (2nd ed)*. London: MacMillan Press Ltd. 1988.
- Wintle, Justin. *Makers of Nineteenth Century Culture 1800-1914*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1982.
- Yaeger, Patricia. *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1988.